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INFLUENCE OF CHRISTIANITY  
ON SOCIAL AND POLITICAL IDEAS

REV. A. J. CARLYLE, D. LITT.

*Christian Social Union Handbooks*  
edited by Henry Scott Holland, D. D.



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CHRISTIAN SOCIAL UNION HANDBOOKS

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**THE INFLUENCE OF CHRISTIANITY  
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**BY A. J. CARLYLE, D.LITT.**

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THESE Handbooks, issued under conditions sanctioned by the Central Executive of the Christian Social Union, are commended to our members and to the public as being good and adequate statements of the Social Problems in different aspects. Some of the Handbooks will approach more nearly than others to being expressions of our common principles. But, in any case, for the particular opinions expressed, or the mode of expressing them, only the author is responsible.

THE EDITOR

*Acting on behalf of the Central Executive.*

CHRISTIAN SOCIAL UNION HANDBOOKS

*Edited by* HENRY SCOTT HOLLAND, D.D.

# THE INFLUENCE OF CHRISTIANITY

UPON  
SOCIAL AND POLITICAL IDEAS

BY

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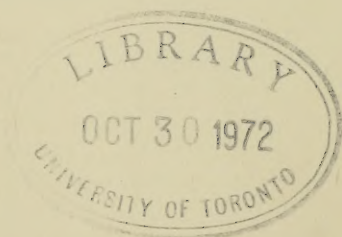
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## EDITOR'S PREFACE

THE Christian Social Union aims at producing citizens inspired by spiritual convictions and equipped by patient and thorough study.

It is to further this aim that these Handbooks have been written.

They ground their appeal on the Name of Christ: and they set out the actual and precise conditions of social experience under which the service of men, for Christ's sake, can be realised.

Each department has been entrusted to an expert who is in thorough possession of his material. The reader can be confident that the treatment is adequate, and the statements trustworthy.


Each has tried to make the Handbook committed to him a complete exposition of the matter in hand.

It has, also, been considered right that the first Number of the Series should rehearse the central motives and aims with which the Union identifies itself.

It is hoped that these direct practical Handbooks will help the members of our Union to carry out into efficient action the convictions to which Belief and Study have led them.

I have been assisted throughout, in all the work that falls to an Editor, by the advice and judgment of Dr. Rashdall, to whom the Executive had authorised me to turn for help, and who has always given me all that I asked for.

HENRY SCOTT HOLLAND.



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## P R E F A C E

I HAVE endeavoured to set out briefly some of the most important features of the influence of Christianity upon social and political ideas, and have given a certain number of references to the writings of the Fathers and others. For the full text of these passages I must refer the reader to the *History of Political Theory in the Middle Ages* by my brother and myself.

The subject with which I have endeavoured to deal is the influence of Christianity on ideas and principles; the history of the influence of Christianity on social and political life is another, and a much larger and more complicated subject.

A. J. CARLYLE.

OXFORD, Dec. 1, 1911.



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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

THE subject of the influence of Christianity, of the degree and modes in which Christianity has influenced the political conceptions and the social ideals of men, is one of great interest. It is obvious to any inquirer that the political ideas and the social ideals of the modern world are very different indeed from those of the ancient, and it is natural that we should think that in some measure this difference is due to the influence of Christianity. It is indeed a commonplace of literature to urge that in this, that, or the other respect, Christianity has modified the tendencies of political and social life. But, though the subject is one of great interest, it is also one of great difficulty. The elements out of which the characteristic structure and conceptions of the modern world have grown up, are very complex, and it is by no means easy to trace the different influences which have affected its development, to their original sources. It is, I think, historically of great importance that we should ask ourselves : What part has Christianity played in the transformation of the ancient ideas into those of the modern world ? But we must begin by making

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clear to ourselves that the inquiry is not simple or easy, and we must be prepared for conclusions which may not always and altogether fit into the commonplaces of received tradition.

As soon as we begin to consider this subject seriously, we shall discover that a great deal that has been said about the influence of Christianity—whether in praise of that influence or by way of criticism of it—has been rash and ill-considered. Much has been claimed for Christianity without any sufficient reason; much has been urged against Christianity without any serious examination of the facts. We may take a few examples of what I mean. Among the charges which have been brought against Christianity in its influence upon social and political ideas, it has, for instance, often been said that it has tended to develop the sense of the importance of the individual life, as contrasted with the importance of the social or public life to such an extent as gravely to interfere with the ideal of citizenship. It has often been said that while to the ancient thinker the good man and the good citizen were identical, to the modern thinker, under the influence of Christian conceptions, the ideals of citizenship and the ideals of general goodness have drifted apart. It has often been said that while the whole moral conception of the ancient world centred in the conception of the good citizen, the moral conceptions of the modern world, under the influence of Christianity, centre in the good man who may or may not be a good citizen. And it is



argued, therefore, that the influence of Christianity has been unfavourable to the development of the highest ideal of citizenship. Now it is quite true that there is a very great difference between the tendency of the theory of the ancient philosophers like Plato and Aristotle with regard to the place of citizenship in human life, and the tendencies of thought in the modern world. And it is also quite true that the development of the conception of the supreme importance of the individual life, the individual character, has been fostered and promoted by Christianity. But it is often overlooked that the high development of the conception of individuality, of the importance of the individual as contrasted with, or as independent of social or public life, was antecedent to Christianity and found expression in the whole philosophical tendency of the ancient world after Aristotle. It is often forgotten that much of the stress which is laid by Christianity upon the individual life, and much of the comparative neglect of the obligation of the social and public life, was anticipated by the tendencies of the Stoic philosophy. The truth is, that what sometimes in this respect is taken to be due to the influence of Christianity, is in a large measure due to causes and circumstances to which Christianity is related, but of which it is not the only source. Let me take another example. It is often said that the tendency of Christianity has been to emphasise the virtues of meekness and submission in such a way and to such a degree as to be un-

favourable to the development of the demand for political freedom, and Christianity, it is therefore said, has been in the past, and for that matter is still, the enemy of social and political progress. There is no doubt that there is much truth in this charge. The influence of Christianity, certainly the influence of the Christian Church, has often been thrown in favour of the existing authority or the existing institution, and Christian teachers have often urged upon men who demanded reformation or freedom, the duty, or at any rate the virtue, of submission. But, on the other hand, it is often forgotten that when we look more closely at Christianity in relation to this subject, we also find quite other tendencies, quite other principles. Where some Christian writers and thinkers have been the advocates of submission, other Christian writers and thinkers have been the foremost advocates of revolt and of progress. And in both cases the advocates, whether of submission or of resistance, have claimed to find sanction for their views within the Christian tradition itself. These examples will suffice to bring out what I should call the careless traditional criticisms directed against the influence of Christianity.

On the other hand, many claims have been made for Christianity which are, at least, equally unfounded. It has often been said that Christianity was the main instrument in the destruction of slavery. No doubt there have been times when the movement against slavery has been inspired, at

any rate in a large measure, by men of very strong Christian convictions, but, when we come to examine this question carefully, we are compelled to recognise, in the first place, that the disappearance of slavery in the western world was primarily due to political and economic causes, and in the second place, that, in theory at least, the influence of Christianity, or at least of Christianity as interpreted by the Church and by many ecclesiastical writers, was exerted in favour of slavery. There can be no doubt, as I shall have occasion to point out later, that the Christian Fathers, so far from destroying the institution of slavery, supplied it with a new foundation at a time when the older philosophical justification of slavery had been abandoned. If we are to measure the whole influence of Christianity upon the institution of slavery, we must take account of such facts as the severe condemnation by the Council of Gangrae (A.D. 362), of all those who encouraged a slave to escape from his master, not to speak at all of the religious arguments of the defenders of slavery in the southern states of North America in the nineteenth century. Again, it has often been said that it is Christianity which has elevated the position of women, and there is little doubt that this is substantially true. But, it is not wholly true. Those who will be at pains to examine the legal position of women under the Roman Empire, will at once see that at least the legal emancipation of women had been carried to a very high point,

and they will see further that during the Middle Ages this legal emancipation was in a large measure lost. In many respects at least, the position of women was not so independent in the modern world as it was during the Roman Empire, until quite recently. It would, of course, be very hasty and very foolish to maintain that this reaction was mainly due to Christian influences. I think it was in the main due to the fact that in this particular matter the Teutonic societies which overthrew the Roman Empire were on a very much lower level of moral civilisation than the Empire. But I think something also was due to the fact that Christianity, as it came from the East, brought with it, accidentally no doubt rather than essentially, conceptions of the character and of the position of women which were Semitic and Oriental rather than Western.

These illustrations will serve to show how necessary it is that we should be very careful and very exact in the consideration of the precise nature of the influence of Christianity upon political and social ideas. It is, as I said before, quite true that the political and social ideas of the modern world are very different from those of the ancient world—that is, especially from the ideas of the ancient world as represented in the writings of Plato and Aristotle. But we must be very careful to consider how far this transformation was due to the influence of Christianity, and how far it was due to circumstances and causes which were

already powerful and operative when Christianity appeared in the world.

If we examine the matter with any care, we shall discover that much which distinguishes the modern world from the world of Aristotle and Plato is to be found already existing in the centuries which immediately preceded the Christian era. There is a vast gulf between the political and social ideas of Plato and Aristotle, and the political and social ideas of the world into which Christianity came. The gulf indeed is so great, the difference is so marked, that if it were not too paradoxical, I should be inclined to say that the real interval between the modern world and the ancient world lies in the centuries between Aristotle and Cicero, while the moral and political civilisation of the world from that time downwards has been, in the main, continuous. It is indeed, even yet, far too little understood, that Christianity appeared in the world just about the time when certain great transformations of human feeling and even of philosophical theory, which had been coming about gradually, were expressed in literary works which have come down to us. Unhappily we cannot at present trace fully the earlier stages of the development of those new ideas and principles, for the literature—and there was once a great literature which dealt more or less with them—has in the main disappeared. Of the philosophical treatises between Aristotle and Cicero only a few scattered fragments have survived. Some fragments have survived, and



have been carefully put together in various collections, but the fragments are such as to make it very difficult to trace the history of the development, especially of social and political ideas, during those centuries. Indeed, there is here a task which is waiting for a competent scholar who will be at pains to work carefully upon the fragments and the materials which have survived. I think it is possible that the sufficiently diligent and careful study of these fragments, and the comparison of them with the considerable mass of historical and other literature which has come down to us, might throw much light upon this period of transition. But at present, all that we can say is that we can recognise in the first century B.C. that the political and social ideas of Aristotle and Plato have given place to a system of thought which is, in many respects, the same as the modern, and which is, in many respects, very sharply indeed contrasted with the political and social ideas of Aristotle and Plato. It is not too much to say that in these centuries the world had changed, and that men's conceptions of human life, and especially of the relation of men to each other, had been profoundly transformed. It is fortunate for a serious examination of the nature of the Christian influence, that from the first century B.C. we have again a body of literature which enables us, not completely of course, but with a considerable amount of precision, and with considerable fulness, to determine the character of the political and social ideas and

tendencies of the world into which Christianity came. I must briefly explain the nature and character of these sources.

In the first place, before the middle of the first century B.C., we have, in the writings of Cicero, a body of philosophical work in which the movements of the preceding centuries and the general principles current in his own time, are fully, even if not profoundly, summed up. It may no doubt be said, and with justice, that Cicero is not in any sense a profound or original philosopher; that he is a facile and rhetorical writer rather than a careful thinker; that there is little trace of any originality or of any independent power in his philosophical work. This is at any rate generally said, and, as far as I am capable of judging the matter, this is more or less true. But this very fact, so far from detracting from the importance of the work of Cicero, from our point of view rather enhances it. Cicero was not an original thinker, but he was an accomplished literary man and an important political personage. He knew the books and the men of his own time, and he had the instinct of the public man for the general tendencies of thought, and perhaps, if we may say so without intending any offence, the tendency of the political man to fall in with that which was likely to be popularly understood and popularly accepted. But all these qualities make Cicero's evidence as to the general character and tendencies of the thought, of the ideas of the time, peculiarly important. In a more

original thinker we might often be perplexed by the question whether this or that conception should be attributed to the writer himself or belongs to the stock of general ideas current in his time. In Cicero's case we have no such difficulty. We have no reason to attribute to him, at any rate in most cases, any originality or any great independence of judgment, and we may be very fairly confident that what he lays down as established, in the way of the general presuppositions of political and social theory, corresponds with the general philosophical tendencies of his time. In Cicero's writings, then, we have an extremely valuable source of information, and we may be very grateful that we have this information in writings which are always pleasant and easy, and often eloquent. We shall presently see the immense importance of the information with which Cicero's writings supply us.

In the next place, we have in the writings of Seneca, about a hundred years after Cicero, a very complete statement of the standpoint of those who more rigorously followed the Stoic tradition. It has often indeed been urged that Seneca is not a profound or a rigorous thinker any more than Cicero, and that he is a rhetorician rather than a moral philosopher. This is probably, in a measure, true. And yet it remains that Seneca does give us a very clear and full account, especially of the social and political ideas which were generally accepted among those trained in the Stoic tradition

of his time, and he furnishes us with what is, in some respects, a very full and precise picture of the conceptions on these subjects of the ancient world at the time when Christianity first appeared.

In the third place, we have some extremely interesting information in the great body of the Roman jurisprudence of the second and third centuries, which is contained in what is called the *Digest* of Justinian. This *Digest*, which forms the largest part of the great collection of the Roman law made by Justinian in the sixth century, consists of extracts from the works of the greatest Roman jurists, almost all of them belonging to the second century and the beginning of the third century of the Christian era. In this work we have the opinions of what is usually a very conservative class on many great subjects of social and political importance, and we can derive from them some very important evidence as to the general tendency of thought, even in the more conservative quarters of society, upon some very important social and political questions—and all this apart from the influence of Christianity. It is indeed possible, though I do not think it is probable, that these great Roman jurists might have been influenced, indirectly if not directly, by those Christian opinions which, in the second century, were beginning to spread through Roman society. But I think there is very little reason indeed to suppose that such an influence is represented in these works to any serious extent.

If, then, we are going to try and estimate

the character and significance of the specifically Christian ideas, we must be very careful always to bear in mind that it is necessary to inquire first, what were the ideas and principles current in the world into which Christianity came. And, if I may anticipate a little that to which we shall have to return later, we shall, I think, find that in many respects at least, the fundamental Christian principles of social and political relations are not new and original, but that, in many respects at least, Christianity accepted and made its own, principles and ideas which were already current. This does not of course mean that the fact that Christianity did accept them, and did make them its own, is unimportant. On the contrary, there can be very little doubt that in many cases Christianity, in making these principles or ideas its own, gave them a depth and reality, and added to them a force, which they had not before possessed.

It is only when we have observed this that we shall be in a position to recognise that there are certain aspects of political or social principles which arose directly or exclusively from conditions related to Christianity and the character of the Christian society. Some principles which the Church held, and which derive their power in modern society from the impulse of the Christian Church, are of profound and permanent significance; some, on the other hand, have been of doubtful value, and sometimes it must be admitted doctrines which originated in the Church and were taught



by Churchmen, have been harmful and mischievous. What we shall finally recognise is this, I think : that Christianity has embodied in itself, and has, in some measure at any rate, been the means of handing down to later ages, many great and profoundly significant conceptions with regard to human life and to the nature of human society, and that while it is true that some of these did not first begin with the teaching of Christianity, yet they were recognised by Christianity as being in such a sense in agreement with all its own principles as to be rightly and necessarily embodied in its doctrine of human nature and of human life.

## CHAPTER II

### THE CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE OF EQUALITY

WE have seen that in order to understand the influence of Christianity on political and social ideas, we must take account of the conceptions of the world into which Christianity came, and not merely of the conceptions of the ancient world of some centuries earlier. And we have also seen what are some of the important sources from which we can derive information. We can therefore now proceed to consider the character and the significance of some of the most important of the Christian conceptions with regard to human nature in society, in social, and in political relations.

The first and most fundamental Christian principle of society is the principle of the likeness or equality of human nature; the conception of the equal value of human nature in the sight of God and of honest men, and the conception of the universal capacity of human nature for the highest life—the life of communion with, and service of, the Divine. We shall, I think, all remember some of the great phrases in which St. Paul expresses this conception, especially his words in his letter to the Galatian churches. ‘There can be neither Jew nor Greek, there can be neither bond nor

free, there can be no male and female: for ye are all one man in Christ Jesus' (Gal. iii. 28). We shall understand, I think, without difficulty, the immense scope and significance of such a phrase, how emphatically it sets aside all conception of difference in the highest things between different classes, how emphatically St. Paul repudiates the idea of any inherent or intrinsic difference between the nature of the slave and the nature of the freeman. St. Paul says very much the same thing again in his letter to the Colossian Church. 'Ye have put off the old man with his doings, and have put on the new man, which is being renewed unto knowledge after the image of him that created him: where there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bondman, freeman: but Christ is all, and in all' (Col. iii. 9-11). And we may again compare the words of St. Paul in the first letter to the Corinthians. 'For in one Spirit were we all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether bond or free; and were all made to drink of one Spirit' (1 Cor. xii. 13). And I think we may very well find a practical illustration of the significance of these phrases in the letter of St. Paul to Philemon, with regard to his runaway slave Onesimus. 'For perhaps he was parted from thee for a season, that thou shouldest have him for ever, no longer as a slave but more than a slave, a brother beloved.' These phrases of St. Paul are indeed memorable in the history of

religion, and in the history of the progress of human sentiment and ideas. What do they then mean? What do they signify? In the first place it is well to notice that these phrases of St. Paul only carry out in a more precise fashion the principles which are embodied in the doctrine of our Lord as presented in the Gospels. We shall remember how in several places our Lord uses language which implies that the ancient nationalist religious conceptions of Judaism were bound to give way to the universalist principle, that in the sight of God all races of men are equally dear, and that all men are made for communion with God. It will be well to notice one of these phrases. In St. Matthew viii. 11 and 12, our Lord says: 'I say unto you, that many shall come from the east and the west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven: but the sons of the kingdom shall be cast forth into the outer darkness.' What St. Paul says is only the more explicit declaration of the fact that the Gospel of Christ is for mankind, and not for one nation only.

But we must ask ourselves now a little more exactly: What do St. Paul's words imply? They do not of course imply at all the conception that all men are possessed of equal capacities and equal powers even in the spiritual sphere, and still less in the intellectual or physical sphere. It is obvious, indeed no one has ever disputed it, that there are inequalities in human nature, of physical

development, of intellectual development, and of moral development, and we may well say that there may be great diversities of spiritual development. Neither Christians nor any other body of people have ever maintained a conception of equality which denies this. But the doctrine of St. Paul is none the less a revolutionary doctrine, and contradicts the principles recognised by the great philosophers of the ancient world three hundred and four hundred years before Christ as being fundamental in the structure of human society. St. Paul does mean that human nature is substantially alike, and that it is exactly in the highest aspects of human nature that the likeness is most profound. St. Paul does mean that whatever may be the external conditions or circumstances of life, all men are made for the life of virtue, of religion; are equal as regards the enjoyment of communion with God Himself.

Now, in order to understand the full significance of this, we must compare St. Paul's principles with those of Aristotle. And we shall find that between the principles of St. Paul and the principles of Aristotle there lies a profound gulf. In the first book of Aristotle's *Politics* he finds himself compelled to discuss the nature, the rationale of slavery. It is obvious that questions were being raised with regard to slavery even in Aristotle's time, of a serious and searching nature. It is evident that some thinkers, at any rate, had begun to doubt whether the institution of slavery was really a justifiable institution; whether it was really



possible to vindicate the servile subjection of man to man, and the total subordination of the interests of the slave to the interests of the master. Aristotle justifies slavery. He thinks that there are serious and grave reasons which make slavery both inevitable and justifiable. And Aristotle's treatment of it is not slight nor reckless of moral principle. He writes a serious, and, judging from the standpoint of Aristotle and the men of his time, a not discreditable defence and justification of slavery. And it is here that we come to the important point. Aristotle defends slavery not at all in the way in which the reckless defender of modern industrial or economic abuses sometimes defends those abuses, namely on the ground that they may be improper and immoral, but that they are economically unavoidable. Aristotle defends slavery on the ground that there is a serious moral and reasonable justification of it. Aristotle finds the rationale of slavery in the judgment that there is a profound division or inequality in mankind, in the judgment that some men are naturally slaves and some men are naturally masters. For some men are possessed of reason in the full and complete sense of the word, while others are possessed of reason only in a very partial and incomplete sense. They may have reason enough to recognise and to follow the guidance of reason in others, but they have not reason enough to enable them to guide and control their own lives. The free man, that is, the man who is properly free, is the man who is



capable of controlling himself, capable of directing and controlling his life by principles of reason. The natural slave is the man who is not capable of this. There are men, therefore, for whom it is really in the long run better that they should be under the control of a master, for thus, at least, their life is brought into some kind of relation with reason, and may, at least, be directed towards some reasonable end, while if left to themselves their lives will be wasted under the domination of merely animal and brutal impulses. This judgment of Aristotle is one of the profoundest significance. To him the whole economic structure of society rests upon the principle of an inequality not merely external or formal, but internal and profoundly significant. The inequality of human nature lies just in the most intimate and the most significant aspect of human nature, for these irrational men, as they are not capable of the life of reason, are not strictly capable of the life of virtue. Outwardly, as Aristotle says, the slave may have much resemblance to the master, but inwardly there is a profound and fundamental difference.

Now I think we shall be in a position to understand the immense and revolutionary character of St. Paul's judgment. For it is exactly where Aristotle finds the ground of slavery that St. Paul finds the fundamental equality of human nature, that is, in the rational and spiritual life. For when St. Paul conceives of men as being capable of the life of religion, capable of the life of communion with

God, he means that men are capable of the life of reason and of virtue. And it is because all men are thus capable of the life of reason and of virtue that they are all alike, that they may be one in Christ. We shall understand, then, that between Aristotle and St. Paul there lies a great gulf. The Aristotelian theory of human life is based upon the presupposition of the inequality of human nature; the theory of St. Paul is based upon the assertion of the fundamental likeness or equality of human nature. St. Paul's doctrine is the modern doctrine, for though I cannot now stop to discuss the matter, if any one will be at pains to examine the structure of modern society, he will discover that the idea of the equality of human nature is not merely a sentimental conception of the modern humanitarian, but is actually the basis of the whole structure of the political order of modern society—that is, in the civilised countries of western Europe.

We have, then, seen what is the judgment with regard to human nature with which Christianity sets out. We must now make ourselves clear that this is the continual doctrine of the Christian writers. I will illustrate this briefly from the writings of the Fathers. Here is a passage in a little work of the second century called *Octavius*, written by Minucius Felix, one of the first Christian works, after the New Testament, which comes evidently from a man belonging to what we call the educated classes, that is, a man who has something

of literary culture and tradition. He says that all men, without difference of age, sex, or rank, are born with a capacity and power of reason and feeling, and they obtain wisdom, not by fortune but by nature.<sup>1</sup> The particular turn of the phrase is, I think, open to criticism, but the general meaning is plain, that all men have reason and the capacity for wisdom. We may, again, notice some phrases of a writer named Lactantius, in the early part of the fourth century, a writer interesting to us otherwise because of the number of fragments of ancient writings, which but for him might have been lost, and which he has preserved. In discussing the nature of justice he gives the first place to what he calls *pietas*, and then urges that the second part of justice is *equitas*, that is, the temper which teaches a man to put himself on an equality with his fellow-men, the quality which, as he says, Cicero had called '*equabilitas*.' God, he says, who brings forth and inspires men, wished them all to be equal. He made them all for virtue and promised them all immortality. No one in God's sight is a slave or a master; He is the Father of all men; we are all therefore His children.<sup>2</sup> Here again is another phrase a little later from the writer called 'Ambrosiaster,' probably of the middle of the fourth century. Masters, he says, must remember that their lordship extends only over the body; they have no authority over the soul. God only

<sup>1</sup> *Octavius*, xvi.

<sup>2</sup> Lactantius, *Div. Inst.*, v. 15, 16.

is the master of that. Let them remember this, and only exact just service from their slaves, who are still their equals, not to say their brethren.<sup>1</sup> And then finally we must notice some remarkable phrases of Gregory the Great at the end of the sixth century. In his book on *Pastoral Care* he admonishes all masters to remember that their slaves are of the same nature as themselves, lest they should cease to recognise that those whom they may hold in bondage are equal with them.<sup>2</sup> And in a passage in his work on the book of Job—a passage which is constantly referred to in later literature, which is indeed the classical expression of this conception of human equality—Gregory admonishes great men to remember that ‘by Nature we are all equal,’ that Nature brought forth all men equal, and that it is only by the secret dispensation of God that some men are set over, while some are inferior to, others.<sup>3</sup> *Omnes namque natura aequales sumus.* This is one of the most famous phrases in Christian literature, and it is well to observe it particularly, for here is a writer, not of the French Revolution, not a modern humanitarian, not a sentimental enthusiast, but one of the greatest practical administrators in the history of western Europe who lays down this great broad proposition: ‘All men are by Nature equal.’ Here, then, is the doctrine with which Christianity set out on its

<sup>1</sup> Ambrosiaster, *Commentary on Coloss.*, iv. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Gregory the Great, *Lib. Past.*, iii. 5.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, *Exp. Mor.*, xxi. 15.

course through the world ; here is the doctrine which, in spite of all failures, and of all uncertainties, does actually dominate the whole structure of modern society. We can understand how significant and far-reaching its influence has been on the modern world. We can see how far removed is the conception of human nature in relation to society which is held by the modern world and that which was held by the ancient.

But now we must be careful to observe that while Christianity accepted and made its own this doctrine of the equality of human nature, it would be a very great mistake to suppose that this doctrine originated with, or was first discovered by, the Christian thinkers. The truth is that when Christianity came into the world it found this doctrine already established as what was probably the most generally accepted conception of political and social thought. We will look at some words of Cicero which will help to make this clear. There is no resemblance, Cicero says, in Nature so great as that between man and man ; there is no equality so complete. There is only one possible definition of mankind. Reason is common to all. Men differ in learning, but they are equal in the capacity for learning. There is no race which, under the guidance of Nature, cannot attain to virtue. Nature has given to all men reason, that is, true reason, and therefore the true law, which is right reason, commanding and forbidding. Not only in things which are right but even in those things that are wrong, is this



resemblance, this likeness of the human race, to be observed. What nation is there that does not love courtesy, kindness; that does not esteem the man who is grateful and mindful of a benefit? What nation is there that does not hate the proud, the malicious, the cruel and the ungrateful? <sup>1</sup>

Here is, as you see, the dogmatic statement of the likeness, the equality, of human nature, not only superficial but intrinsic, the equal capacity of human nature for virtue. And this is laid down in explicit terms some half century before the Christian era. Had we found these sentiments in an original thinker, we might have been inclined to attribute them to some personal conviction of the writer, but as we have already observed, it is the great importance of Cicero that he clearly represents, not an individual judgment, but the judgments which were generally accepted among educated people in his time. We may go down a hundred years later to the Stoic philosopher Seneca, and we find him again laying down the same principles. The slave, he says, is of the same nature as his master. Virtue can be attained by all—the free, the freeman, the slave, the king, and the exile. Virtue cares nothing for house or for fortune but only for the man. A slave can be just, brave, and magnanimous. Or again, in another place we read: We have the same beginnings, the same origin, we are all descended from one common parent, the world. To this we may all trace our

<sup>1</sup> *De Legibus*, i. 10-12.



origin, whether by splendid or by humble steps. It is fortune that makes man a slave—slavery is hateful to all men. And finally : Slavery is, after all, only external, only affects the body of man. He errs greatly who thinks that the condition of slavery affects the whole man. The better part of man has nothing to do with it. The body may belong to a master ; the mind is its own—it cannot be given in slavery.<sup>1</sup> Nothing is more noticeable here than the emphatic way in which Seneca finds the very centre of the essential equality of human nature, in the mind or reason of man, just where Aristotle finds the foundation, the essential principle of inequality. We may now, again, go down some hundred and fifty years later to the great Roman lawyers of the end of the second century, and we find them again laying down the same general principles. Here is a famous phrase of Ulpian's : ' As far as concerns the natural law, all men are equal.'<sup>2</sup> Or again, in another place, speaking of the nature of manumission : ' Manumission began with the law of nations, inasmuch as by the law of nations we were all born free.'<sup>3</sup> And again, here are the words of another great jurist, Florentinus : ' Slavery is an institution of the law of nations by which man is subjected to another, contrary to nature.'<sup>4</sup> Or again, here are the words of Tryphoninus : ' Inasmuch as liberty

<sup>1</sup> Seneca, *De Beneficiis*, iii. 18-28.

<sup>2</sup> *Digest*, L. 17, 32.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, I. 1, 4.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, I. 5, 11.

belongs to the law of nature, lordship was introduced by the law of nations.' <sup>1</sup> It is certainly of very great significance to find that these eminent jurists, men, that is, who belonged to a class which is naturally conservative in the matters of the great institutions of human society, should assume as clearly and as distinctly as Seneca and Cicero, that men are by nature equal; that whatever justification the institution of slavery may have, at any rate this is not found in any natural inequality of human nature.

I think this will show clearly enough that the doctrine of equality was not introduced into the western world by Christianity, but was already present, and was probably the normal and paramount view when the Christian religion appeared. The truth is, as I have said before, that between the time of Aristotle and the Christian era, the sentiment and opinion of the ancient world with regard to human nature and its characteristics, had gradually changed. To Aristotle there seemed to be a profound and impassable gulf between the irrational and servile nature of the barbarian and the reasonable nature of the Greek. To the men of the first century before Christ such a conception evidently seemed impossible. Of the literary history of this transition we know little; we are not able to trace the stages through which the new opinion developed, or the nature of the arguments by which it was established. As I have

<sup>1</sup> *Digest*, XII. 6, 64.

said, the philosophical literature of the period has almost entirely disappeared. We can see the results of the great change ; we cannot clearly trace the process of the change. But, I think it is at the same time true that though we cannot trace the history of the change in theory, we can recognise without any great difficulty the main circumstances of fact which produced, or at any rate which helped to produce, the change in theory. There can be, I think, little doubt that this unanimous judgment of the thinkers and lawyers of the later centuries of the ancient world, was based upon the actual experience of the civilised western world. Within a few years of the time when Aristotle wrote, Alexander the Great set out upon his conquering march through western Asia, and within a few years the countries bordering upon the eastern Mediterranean were united with each other as parts of a Greek Empire. We might naturally, at first sight, think that this easy conquest of the barbarian races by the Greek would have confirmed the Greek in his conviction of his intrinsic natural superiority, but the actual consequences were just the opposite. The Greek went out into the world a civilised man among barbarians, but he discovered within a very short time that those barbarians were capable of learning almost all that he had to teach them. This was, indeed, so much the case, that within no very long time the centre of Greek culture shifted from Athens to great Oriental cities like Alexandria and

Antioch. And the process which was begun by the Alexandrian and the Macedonian Empires, was completed by the development of the Roman Empire. The Romans, indeed, conquered both Asia and Greece, but the Romans could never consider themselves as the intellectual superiors, and hardly even as the intellectual equals, of the Greeks. Whatever they had of literature and of art they learned from the Greeks, and it was impossible therefore for them to look upon themselves as being the natural superiors of the Greeks, and the Greeks as being naturally their inferiors. The Macedonian and Roman Empires made it plain to men that all those races were at least capable of learning the civilisation which they had to teach. That is, the Greeks and Romans discovered the homogeneity of their nature with that of the Orientals and Africans.

It is this experience which probably, more than anything else, tended to destroy the doctrine of inequality. It is not certain how far the Jews, and with them the founders of Christianity, had learned these ideas from the contact of Judaism with Hellenism, or how far these conceptions had been growing up in the Hebrew society itself. I think we may say without any hesitation that we can trace the beginnings of this enlarged view of human nature in, at any rate, the greater prophets of Israel. But how far it is to them that we must look for the source of the Christian doctrine, would be more than I can at

present say. We have then, in this Christian doctrine of the fundamental equality of human nature, the first and most fundamental principle of Christendom with regard to human nature and society. It is indeed evident that this notion did not originate only in Christianity ; but it is also certain that from the first it was essential to Christianity, and it was chiefly by the influence of the Christian thinkers and writers that the conception was gradually drawn out, and applied to the actual circumstances of human life.

## CHAPTER III

### HISTORY OF THE INFLUENCE OF THE THEORY OF EQUALITY—I

WE have seen that Christianity sets out with the principle of equality. Whatever else Christianity means in regard to social matters, it means that from the standpoint of religion human nature is recognised as being equal in its essential quality. This is the first and, to my thinking, the most fundamental aspect of the Christian conception of human nature and society. This conception, this principle, did not indeed originate with Christianity, but on the other hand Christianity accepted it, and made it its own. We must now consider briefly the later history of this conception. We begin by asking whether this conception—which was thus fundamental in primitive Christianity—whether it has continued to be an accepted principle of the Christian doctrine of society? We must ask ourselves what has been the practical significance of this theory? Has it been in the history of the past a mere theory, or has it been a living and a dominant principle of life? And finally, we shall have to ask ourselves whether it still continues to be the principle of Christendom; what is its significance and its influence to-day?



The first question we have to ask ourselves then, is, whether this conception continued to be the principle of the Christian Church? This subject needs no very lengthy treatment. We can say without any hesitation that no other conception of human nature in relation to society has ever been known to the Christian Church, or been recognised by the Christian conscience. The principles which, as we have seen, were set out by the Fathers, were reproduced with great emphasis and force throughout the Middle Ages. In order to make ourselves quite clear about this, we may first consider some phrases from works of the writers of the ninth century. It is with the ninth century that the ideas and conceptions of the new world, which was being built up on the ruins of the ancient empire of the west, began to find articulate expression in a literary form. Until the end of the sixth century we have a large, even an abundant literature, but from the seventh and eighth centuries little has survived, and indeed it is probably true that little was produced, for the confusion of Europe, the chaos which followed the downfall of the great political and social structure of the western empire, was very great. Our own Teutonic ancestors were not mere savages; they were, after all, barbarians capable of learning, and, as it proved in the end, not unwilling to learn, and possessing, even in their own traditions, considerable elements of a progressive civilisation, but they were not yet at the stage at which careful or

systematic thinking and writing could be expected. It is not until the ninth century that we again find a large and abundant literature dealing with the criticism of life from many different points of view.

It is, as will be easily understood then, of very great importance to discover what were the ruling principles or conceptions of life accepted in the new society. The old world was gone, and it might be thought that with the old world those great moral principles or conceptions, such as that of the equality of human nature, might have disappeared. We might have imagined that the new conquering races would be little inclined to accept, even formally, the principle of fundamental equality between themselves and those whom they had conquered. And indeed, here is one of the points where the Christian Church undoubtedly played a very important part. For, at any rate formally, it is through the Christian Church that the conception of equality was handed down to our Teutonic ancestors, and it was by it, and by its great authority, that it was preserved and enforced. There are, indeed, some very interesting questions which might be raised, but which we have no time here to discuss, as to the actual tendencies proper to the Teutonic societies. There was a time when historical students would have been inclined to lay great stress upon the idea that the Teutonic races brought with them into western Europe the conceptions proper to tribes of equals and freemen, and we might have been inclined to

say that the conception of the natural equality or freedom of man would fall easily into the prevailing conceptions of the Teutonic races. I do not think that the serious historical scholar would nowadays like to be quite so dogmatic in these views. He would not pretend to be quite so clear as to the prevailing tendencies of feeling and thought among those races. There are at least some serious historical students who have thought that the distinctions of birth and blood were very strongly felt among the Teutonic races, at and after the period of their settlement in the west, and quite recently one very learned writer has stated, with much care and elaboration, the theory that it was only very reluctantly and very slowly that the idea of equality, even within the religious sphere, even within the organisation of the Church, was accepted by the new races. It has been argued that so strong was the sentiment of blood and the distinction of nobility, that when the Christian Church established itself among the new races, for a long time all the more important places, both in the ecclesiastical hierarchy and even in the monastic life, were generally reserved for men of noble blood, and that it was only very slowly, and in the later Middle Ages, that the notion that such distinctions were improper within the Church, was accepted in northern Europe, and especially in the empire.<sup>1</sup>

This subject is, however, still awaiting a more

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Professor Aloys Schulte, *Der Adel und die Deutsche Kirche im Mittelalter*.

complete and careful examination by historical scholars. However this may be, it is at any rate extremely important to inquire whether, and how far, in the new Teutonic societies the Church was able to maintain and enforce the doctrine of the natural equality and freedom of human nature which had established itself in the ancient empire. There can be no doubt, as I was saying before, that the Church did maintain this doctrine. Here is a very interesting and important statement which we shall find in a work of the early ninth century, called *On the Education of the Layman*, by Jonas, Bishop of Orleans. He first paraphrases and quotes some of the great phrases of Gregory the Great which we considered in the last chapter, and then proceeds himself to say: Let powerful and rich men therefore learn from these sayings of divine and eloquent men. Let them learn that their slaves and the poor are by nature their equals. If therefore the slaves are by nature the equals of their masters, let not those masters think that they can with impunity indulge in fury and violence against their slaves, and beat them with cruel stripes, or injure them by the amputation of their limbs, for they have one God in the heavens. Let the masters rather recognise that those who in this world are humble and lowly, and who are in appearance and in wealth their inferiors, are by nature their equals.<sup>1</sup> Here again is another phrase which is worth noticing; a phrase which is put into

<sup>1</sup> Jonas of Orleans, *De Inst. Laicali*, ii. 22.

the mouth of the Emperor Louis the Pious in a preface to a collection of Capitularies dealing with ecclesiastical and with secular matters: We who are the equals of other men in our nature, and are superior only in the dignity of authority.<sup>1</sup> And in another selection of canons the same sentiments are expressed at greater length. Christian men, whether lay or clerical, are bound to behave towards those who are their inferiors with mercy, for they must remember that they are their brethren, and have one Father, that is God, and one mother, that is the Holy Church.<sup>2</sup> Here is again another very significant statement in one of the letters of Agobard, Archbishop of Lyons, one of the most important men of the earlier part of the ninth century. He is discussing the question of the position of those who were slaves, especially of Jews, and maintains that it is in the highest degree intolerable that any master should have the power to prohibit the baptism of his slaves, and argues that men are by nature equal, and this equality continues in the soul of man whatever may be his external condition.<sup>3</sup> I think these citations will suffice to illustrate the fact that no theory of human nature is known to the ninth century, except this theory of the natural equality, the natural freedom of human nature.

Such is the theory of the ninth century, and if we now come down to the Middle Ages proper, we

<sup>1</sup> *Mon. Germ. Hist. Legum*, Sect. II. vol. i. No. 137.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 154.

<sup>3</sup> Agobard, *Ep.* v.



shall see that the same principles are maintained by the mediæval writers. The canon law, as indeed we might expect, repeats the patristic position. Burchard of Worms and Ivo of Chartres repeat that statement of the collection of canons which I have just mentioned. Gratian in his *Decretum* states very emphatically the unity of human nature in relation to God. 'We all,' he says, 'have one Father in heaven, and each of us, rich and poor, free and freedman and slave, have equally to render account for ourselves and for our souls to God.'<sup>1</sup> Burchard again, in another place, repeats the phrase of St. Isidore, which describes the origin of slavery as being not due to Nature but only to sin, and Paucapalea, the first commentator on Gratian, repeats those phrases of the Roman law which describe slavery as being contrary to Nature, and which set forth that by the natural law all men are born free. As far as the canon law, then, of the Middle Ages is concerned, there is no doubt that the primitive conception of the equality of human nature is fundamental and normal. But the same thing is also true of the mediæval literature which is founded directly upon the study of the ancient law. We find the Roman lawyers or civilians of the twelfth century setting out very clearly the principles which they derived from the ancient law, that slavery is contrary to Nature, by natural law all men are born free, and by the natural law all men are equal. These are the

<sup>1</sup> Gratian, *Decretum*, c. xxix. q. 2, 1.



views of the great jurists of Bologna in the twelfth and the thirteenth centuries, such as Irnerius, Bulgarus, Placentinus, and Hugolinus. There can be no doubt then, that whether we look at the law of the Church, or at that law of the Middle Ages which was derived from the legal system of the ancient world, the doctrine of the natural equality and liberty of human nature was regularly maintained. But what is perhaps even more interesting is that the same principle is recognised very explicitly by the great feudal lawyers of the Middle Ages. And this is the case whether we consider the feudal law in Germany or in other countries. One of the earliest compilations of mediæval German law, the *Sachsenspiegel*, lays down this principle very emphatically, that slavery is not the original condition of men;<sup>1</sup> and Beaumanoir, perhaps the most sagacious and accomplished of the French feudal lawyers of the thirteenth century, is equally explicit.<sup>2</sup> Whether the conception is congenial to the Teutonic tradition or not, there can be no doubt at any rate that by the twelfth and the thirteenth centuries these principles had been accepted as fundamental even by those men, who, like the feudal lawyers, represented the most conservative aspect of the tradition of the new nations.

This, I think, will be sufficient to make it clear, that so far at least as concerns the European judgment of the Middle Ages, that doctrine of

<sup>1</sup> *Sachsenspiegel*, iii. 42.

<sup>2</sup> Beaumanoir, xlv. 32.

equality which we have seen to be fundamental in primitive Christianity, was continued and firmly held. I do not think, indeed, that at any time there has been any serious doubt about the matter among Christian men, though it is probably true that after the contact between the European races and the negro races began in the fifteenth century, there has been an occasional tendency, among careless or unscrupulous persons, to neglect or to forget the original Christian principle. Happily in England, with the great religious revival of the eighteenth century, and on the continent of Europe with the beginnings of the great revolutionary movement, the original and fundamental Christian doctrine has been reasserted with an emphasis which has been unmistakable. When the French revolutionaries placarded the streets of France with the great phrases of liberty and equality, they were only restating the fundamental position of Christianity.

So much then for the continuous history of the conception. We must now consider for a little what the significance of this doctrine may have been. What practical effect has it exercised in the past? As I said in the first chapter, it has often been urged that Christianity destroyed slavery, and I suppose some people would think that this means that the doctrine of the Christian society of the equality of human nature, as it was inconsistent with slavery, so it did directly and immediately contribute to destroy it. But this is

a difficult and intricate question. There can be very little doubt that the disappearance of slavery in Europe, as the later disappearance of serfdom, was in the main due to economic, and in part, to political causes. It is probably true that the influence of the Christian principle contributed something to this. That is, it is at least probable that the great Christian conception of equality had something to do with the gradual disappearance of slavery. There can be little doubt, I think, that the principle of the equality of human nature had at least some relation to the gradual modification of the character of slavery in the ancient world. But it must be remembered that these modifications are, in a large measure, antecedent to, and also in a large measure independent of, the influence of Christianity. It is at least probably true to say that the dogmatic assertion in the later philosophical schools of the equality of human nature has something to do with the gradual limitation of the rights of the master over his slave, or, if we may put it so, with the gradual development of the conception of some sort of human right to be protected by law, in the slave.

This progressive amelioration of the condition of the slave can be traced in the Roman legislation, at any rate from the middle of the first century of the Christian era, when we find the Emperor Claudius endeavouring to protect the slave against exposure or desertion by his master when he was incapacitated through illness or old

age, and the development of this tendency must have been very rapid. Almost at the beginning of the second century, we learn that Hadrian had banished for five years a certain great lady who had outrageously ill-treated her slave women, and Antoninus Pius ordered that slaves who took refuge from the ill-treatment of their masters at the statues of the emperors should not be restored to their master, but should be sold and the price paid to their owners. The great lawyer Gaius sums up the changed conditions in his time when he says that while once the slave had been absolutely in the power of his master, so that the master had the absolute power of life and death over him, now he had no longer this power, but that the man who slew his slave without proper cause was liable to legal proceedings, and that by the laws also, any extreme cruelty of the masters against their slaves was prohibited.<sup>1</sup> This amelioration of the condition of the slave has, it is most probable, some relation to the conviction of the natural equality of human nature. Christianity furthered this, especially in the direction of the extension of the protection of the law over slave women. It is very probable that we can trace to the influence of Christianity the extension of the legislative provisions for this after Constantine's conversion; and whatever may be the truth about this, there is no doubt that the canon law of the Church gradually extended its protection to

<sup>1</sup> Gaius, *Inst.*, i. 53.

the marriage of slaves, so that finally the doctrine of the canon law came to be that the marriage of the slave was as sacred as that of the free person. In one of his decretals, Hadrian iv., in the twelfth century, laid down the principle that inasmuch as in Jesus Christ there is neither free nor slave, and the sacraments are open to all, so also the marriages of slaves must not be prohibited, and that even if they were contracted against the will of the slave's master, they were not to be dissolved by Church authority.<sup>1</sup> So far, then, it is true that the influence of Christianity confirmed and enlarged the tendency to the mitigation of the conditions of slavery. The Church also always encouraged the manumission of slaves as a charitable work acceptable to God.<sup>2</sup>

This does not at all mean, however, that Christianity or the Christian writers attacked or criticised the institution itself. Whatever may have been the ultimate indirect influence of Christianity in contributing to the destruction of slavery, it must be frankly recognised that immediately and formally, the theory of the Church rather tended to strengthen the institution. With the disappearance of the theory of inequality and the justification of slavery as resting upon the inequality of human nature, the older philosophical justification of slavery had disappeared ; and it is very noteworthy that the Roman jurisprudence has no theoretical justification to put in its place. The only thing

<sup>1</sup> *Decretals*, iv. 9. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Gregory the Great, *Ep.* v. 12.



that the Roman lawyer can say in explanation of the institution, is connected with the supposed derivation of the word *servus*, namely, that it is derived from the verb *servare* 'to preserve,' and that the word *servus* means a person who is defeated in battle and who is kept alive instead of being killed, and that a conqueror who might have slain him, if he chooses to keep him alive, is entitled to hold him as a bondservant. The Christian Fathers unhappily found what amounted to a new theoretical justification of slavery. Slavery, Ambrosiaster says, in the middle of the fourth century, is the consequence of man's sin. God made man free, but sin brought slavery into the world.<sup>1</sup> This is drawn out in more precise terms by St. Isidore when he says that it was on account of the sin of the first man that the penalty of slavery was, by the divine will, imposed upon the human race, in order that those who were not fit for freedom might be subjected to the discipline of slavery. Slavery serves to restrain the tendency to evil-doing on the part of the slaves, by putting them under the control of their masters.<sup>2</sup> St. Augustine, in a very famous passage, has expressed the same conception when he says that God did not make reasonable men to be lorded over by men, but that the condition of slavery was, by God's will, imposed upon the sinner, and the first cause of slavery was sin. The object of slavery

<sup>1</sup> Ambrosiaster, *Commentary on Col.*, iv. 1.

<sup>2</sup> St. Isidore of Seville, *Sent.*, iv. 47.



is to preserve the natural and true order.<sup>1</sup> St. Ambrose puts this in another way when he says that it is really better for a vicious man to be a slave. A man who cannot rule himself is better under the authority of a wise man. When Isaac put Esau in subjection to Jacob, he was really conferring upon him a benefit.<sup>2</sup> That is, the Fathers looked upon slavery as one of those disciplinary institutions which are necessary under the actual conditions of human nature, that is, the actual condition of the sinfulness and viciousness of human nature, though it did not belong to the ideal conception of human life. It is, of course, impossible to say how far this theory of the Fathers did actually and practically tend to maintain the institution of slavery, but it is certainly a thing which is significant, and of which we must take account in considering the whole relation of the Christian influence to the institution of slavery.

There is, however, something more still to say. The Church not only justified slavery, but the Fathers urged the obligation of obedience upon the slave in very strong terms. In one of the canons of the Council of Gangrae, held in the year 362, the Church laid its anathema upon any one who, under the pretence of religion, should teach a slave to despise his master or to escape from his service.<sup>3</sup> And this emphatic assertion of a certain

<sup>1</sup> St. Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, xix. 15.

<sup>2</sup> St. Ambrose, *Ep.* xxxvii. and lxxvii. 6.

<sup>3</sup> Council of Gangrae, Canon 3.

right of the master over his slave was not only held by the Fathers, but is repeated in later Christian history. This canon of Gangrae passed into the general body of the canon law, and evidently exercised a considerable influence in the ninth century. Among the letters of Hrabanus Maurus in the ninth century there is one in which the question is discussed as to whether the slave who flies from his master is virtually excommunicated. Hrabanus himself is not inclined to take so severe a view of the offence of the slave, and considers that it depends to a certain extent on the reasons for his flight, but he evidently looks upon it as a very grave offence against religion.<sup>1</sup> The canonical collections of the later Middle Ages repeat the canon of the Council of Gangrae, and in two of these collections, in Burchard and Ivo of Chartres, we find a canon which lays it down that a slave, flying from his master, is to be excluded from communion until he return.<sup>2</sup> The Church, then, not only recognised slavery but lent some of its authority to enforce its permanence upon the slave, and it may be further noticed that the Church rigorously prohibited, for reasons which were probably in themselves justified, the ordination of the slave, and that the mediæval Church was itself a slave-owner on a considerable scale.

Slavery gradually died out, but it will be evident, from what we have just seen, that we must be very

<sup>1</sup> *Mon. Germ. Hist.* Hrabanus Maurus, *Ep.* 30.

<sup>2</sup> Burchard, *Decretum*, xi. 78.

careful how far we attribute, to the Church at any rate, any direct influence in promoting this. And, as far as I know, when slavery revived in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, in consequence of the first contact between the European races and the negroes, the Church, at any rate as a whole, made no effort to prevent it. It appears to me then that what we must recognise is this: That the doctrine of equality was continuous in the western world, and its influence probably combined with the tendency of the economic and historical conditions towards the gradual disappearance of the institution of slavery. We must in the next chapter consider the meaning, the value of the conception in relation to modern conditions.

## CHAPTER IV

### HISTORY OF THE INFLUENCE OF THE THEORY OF EQUALITY—II

WE have recognised the fact that the first principle of the Christian conception of life is represented by the doctrine of human equality: that is, by the conception that as all men are possessed of reason and capable of virtue or goodness, all men are capable of determining and controlling their own lives. It is quite true that, while this principle has never been questioned in the history of Christian civilisation, it is only very slowly and partially that it has worked itself out in the structure of society and the character of social institutions.

We must now briefly consider the relation of this doctrine of equality to the gradual development of democratic or free government. If we consider the matter a little closely we shall recognise that there is now, and probably always has been, a very intimate relation between the assumption of the equality of human nature and the demand for political liberty. It is very noticeable that Cicero, who, as we have already seen, laid down so emphatically the general principle of human equality, although he repeats the Aristotelian classification

of governments, was dissatisfied with the Aristotelian conception that an absolute monarchy, or an aristocracy, even if directed to the benefit of the whole community, was a good government. In Cicero's view an absolute monarchy or an absolute aristocracy, however well intentioned and well directed, was not a satisfactory form of government, because it did not represent adequately the principle of self-government. There is, he says, about such governments something of the nature of slavery.<sup>1</sup> It is at least very significant that a conception like this of Cicero's should find expression at such a time, when the doctrine of the principle of human equality was coming to be clearly recognised.

Cicero represents the last phases of the constitutional republicanism of Rome, and was writing thus at a time when that great constitutional system was about to give place to a system of practical absolutism. The hasty observer might conclude from this that the idea of the expression of liberty and equality in the character of political organisation for the time being disappeared, but this would be to fall into a very grave mistake. It must be clearly understood that the theory of the imperial authority in Rome was always and only that the authority of the emperor was derived from the will of the people. There is no trace in the political theory, especially of the Roman jurisprudence, of any other theory of

<sup>1</sup> Cicero, *De Republica*, i. 26-7.

political authority than this, that the authority of the ruler is derived from the people. The emperor's will, in the famous phrase of the great Roman jurist, Ulpian, has the force of law, but only because the Roman people have chosen to confer upon him their authority.<sup>1</sup> The ancient Aristotelian conception of the authority of government as possibly arising from some supreme pre-eminence on the part of the ruler over his fellows, had given place to the doctrine that authority was only derived from the gift of the community itself.

It is doubtful whether we can assert any direct connection between the mediæval conception of the self-government of the community and the doctrine of equality, but it may, I think, be reasonably said that the mediæval conception of political power as representing not so much the superiority of the ruler as the authority of the whole community, does imply that the free members of the community had at least some right to a share, direct or indirect, in the control of the more vital aspects of the common life. We cannot stop here to discuss the question of the development of the constitutional machinery of government in the Middle Ages, but it is worth while to notice that it is in the Middle Ages that there first grew up the conception of the authority of the ruler as resting upon a contract between himself and the ruled. The doctrine of the social contract, I think, was

<sup>1</sup> *Digest*, I. 4, 1.



derived from the conception of the mutual responsibilities of the people and the ruler as embodied in the reciprocal oath of the mediæval coronation ceremony. As can still be seen in the English ceremony of coronation, the first and one of the most essential aspects of the coronation ceremony lies in the recognition by the people, and in the oath which the ruler takes to maintain justice, and to administer government according to the national law, while the people, in virtue of this oath, through the chief members of the community, swear allegiance to the king. I think it may be properly said that behind all this there does lie the conception that political authority in the community represents the authority of all the equal and free citizens of the community.

It is quite clear that whatever interruption there may have been in the nature of political thought between the ancient empire and the Middle Ages, mediæval society had the same conception of political authority as that which was characteristic of the empire, namely, that all authority ultimately is derived from the people as a whole in virtue of their own action. And this is why the great writers of the Middle Ages are so fond of describing the king as acting in the place of the people—that is, as their representative.

There can be no doubt that it is the conception of equality which lies behind the whole structure of constitutional government in the modern world. The normal assumption of all

constitutional governments, that is, of all governments which have something of that representative machinery, which is best illustrated in the English constitution—the normal assumption of these governments is that all the citizens are equal in such a sense that they are equally entitled to have their share in determining the action and character of the community. And every extension of the franchise, every inclusion of a larger number of people in the body of the electors, represents the further extension of this idea. While no doubt the history of the gradual development of this conception is best studied in the history of the English constitution, the great revolutionary movement of Europe, which began in 1789, has gradually established it as the controlling principle of the political civilisation of the west, and, in spite of a great deal of irresponsible and unthinking talk, no one seriously doubts the propriety of this principle, as no one who seriously reflects can dream of doubting its significance. The political authority of the modern democratic or constitutional State rests upon the assumption that men are as a whole, and normally, equal in the sense we have just described. The principle of self-government in the community is in the first place nothing more or less than the extension of the principle that every normal man is possessed of reason and capacity to control and direct his own life.

The political structure of modern society, then, may properly be taken as representing the gradual

development and working-out of the conception of equality. But this principle will no doubt carry the progressive and civilised societies very much further, for while the political organisation of society rests on the assumption of equality, there is comparatively little recognition of this principle so far in the structure of society in its economic aspects. If we are to understand the whole significance of this principle, we must examine this aspect of the matter a little further. We have already noticed that the slavery of the ancient world disappeared in the Middle Ages, and we may now notice that the serfdom of the Middle Ages gradually died out after the fourteenth century. But in the fifteenth century, in consequence of the contact between the white and the negro races, the institution of slavery once more grew up and became an important factor, not in European life, but of the European settlements in the new world. For the time it might have seemed as though the Christian principle of human nature exercised no restraining influence either on the development of this new slavery or upon the conditions of it. It was not till the eighteenth century that there gradually developed the movement which in the nineteenth century finally destroyed slavery. This movement was connected partly with the development of the democratic idea in Europe, but it may also be truly said that it was very closely connected, especially in England, with a new recognition by Christian men of the incompatibility of their

religious principles with the fact and with the circumstances of slavery.

It is extremely interesting to observe the very close connection in Great Britain between the great revival of religion, of which John Wesley was the most representative figure, and the agitation for the abolition of slavery. It might at first sight seem a little difficult to understand what relation there is between these, but I think that a closer examination makes it comparatively easy to understand the matter. It is very difficult to describe in any one phrase the essential or fundamental aspects of the great Methodist and evangelical movement in Great Britain, but I think we may perhaps put it in some such way as the following. John Wesley and his companions and followers went out to preach the Gospel to every creature, and brought a new life into the whole religion of England, because of their firm conviction that even the humblest, the most ignorant, and the most degraded of men had in them the capacity for the life of communion with God. They did not undervalue—John Wesley certainly never undervalued the benefits of education and culture—but they did profoundly believe, and they acted upon the belief, that, whatever a man had or might not have, he had, and always had, the capacity in him for the highest life—the life of virtue and reason as the ancients would have called it—the life of communion with God as the religious man calls it. It is this which explains how the great modern

missionary movement really sprang in Great Britain from the Methodist and evangelical movement. It was this principle, that all men everywhere are capable of the knowledge of God and of conversion to God, which caused Christian men to recover their sense of the missionary duty of the Christian Church.

It is not difficult to understand that the Evangelicals, who believed with so fresh a conviction that all men were capable of the life of communion with God, found it very difficult and finally impossible to acquiesce in such an institution as that of slavery, which treated a man as the mere instrument or chattel of his fellow-men. It was not by any accident that Cowper, the representative poet of the new religious movement, should also have been one of the first to express his profound aversion to the whole system and conditions of slavery. It is at any rate certain that it was the new Evangelicals joining with that Society of Friends which had in a sense anticipated the evangelical movement by a hundred years, who carried through in the teeth of obloquy and contempt and misrepresentation the great struggle for the emancipation of the slave. And here at least we may feel that the Christian doctrine of equality was no abstract thing, but has had an immense and vital significance.

I think it is probably true that we may trace the influence of the Christian conception of equality not only in the revolt of Christian men against



slavery, but in the beginning and development of the revolt against the dreadful social conditions produced by, or connected with, the industrial revolution and the factory system. I think that it was not by any accident that one of the chief leaders in the movement for the reform of industrial conditions like Lord Shaftesbury represented the evangelical opinions or principles. It must, indeed, be remembered that the claims of humanity, the horror of inhumanity, and of the degradation and waste of human life, were not exclusively apprehended or represented by religious men. Fénelon and Voltaire in different ways represent the beginnings of the great humanitarian movement of the last two centuries. But in England, at any rate, it was a great Evangelical like Lord Shaftesbury, supported in a considerable measure at any rate by other men of the same school, who succeeded in compelling the attention of Englishmen to the horrors of these industrial conditions, especially with relation to the employment of women and children, and who finally succeeded in persuading the country to begin that great series of Factory Acts which have done so much to improve the conditions, and even to further the efficiency, of English industry. It would of course be idle to pretend that all religious men in England, or even all men of the evangelical type, either understood or supported men like Lord Shaftesbury, but I think it is true to say that the Christian religion in the nineteenth century has



done much to compel men's attention to these matters, and to further the efforts of society to create humaner and kindlier conditions.

We are only beginning to work out the meaning of the conception of human equality in the industrial world. It will probably carry us much further than we yet understand. It is true, as indeed a good many timid though well-meaning people feel, that the doctrine of human equality is subversive and intolerant; it is true that just as this conception becomes more firmly rooted in our minds, we shall find ourselves driven to recognise the necessity of even more fundamental reconstructions of social conditions than those which we have yet seen. There are some signs of a tendency of a quasi-scientific kind, represented mainly by men lacking historical knowledge, and not having any intimate acquaintance with the actual history of civilisation, to go back upon this principle; and the Christian religion has a great part to play in resisting these reactionary and unscientific tendencies, and in keeping alive in the minds of men the truth of the great apprehension of the equality of men, the children of the most high God.

## CHAPTER V

### THE PRINCIPLE OF THE UNITY OF LIFE

WE have been considering the meaning and the significance of the conception of equality, and I hope that we have succeeded to a certain extent in understanding both its original significance, and the immense importance of this conception in the whole sphere of political and social theory. We must now consider a principle of life which is of equal significance, and which is set out with equal clearness in the New Testament. This is the principle of the necessary inter-dependence of human lives, the principle that the individual is not self-centred or self-sufficient, but is necessarily and always a member of a larger body in whose life he lives, and through which he derives a great part of his character and his capacities.

There are very few phrases of the New Testament which are more familiar than the words of St. Paul: 'For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of the body, being many, are one body; so also is Christ,' or again, 'And whether one member suffereth, all the members suffer with it; or one member is honoured, all the members rejoice with it' (1 Cor. xii. 12, 26).

St. Paul's conception is set out most completely in this passage of his first letter to the Corinthians, but it is one which is characteristic of his whole mode of thought, and he returns to it in other letters, as in the twelfth chapter of the Romans, and the fourth chapter of the Ephesians. This phrase of St. Paul's has, of course, primarily reference to the unity of the spiritual life, but it is, I think, proper to take it as the expression in the spiritual sphere of a conception which dominates the whole Christian conception of life. To the New Testament and to all serious Christian thinkers, humanity presents itself not as a mere multitude of incoherent and independent units, but as one great society whose members are mutually dependent upon each other, and who find in this dependence, not a sign of weakness or inferiority, but the characteristic principle of real human life.

This conception is one not only important and significant in itself, but of peculiar importance and significance in its historical circumstances, and in its relation to that other principle of life which we have been considering. For it might easily seem at first sight as if the doctrine of human equality, the conception of the individual value, the conception that every man is an end in himself and not merely an instrument of other men's well-being—it might well seem that this conception might tend to the destruction of the conception of the necessity of human relations ; it might easily seem as though

the doctrine of human equality might destroy the conception of mutual dependence, and leave us with a conception of humanity as composed of detached, struggling, and competing individuals. No doubt there have, at various times, been strong tendencies in this direction, and it is probably true to say that at the time of the appearance of Christianity, the circumstances, both of civilised thought and of civilised life, were, in some measure, tending in this direction. The great empires, first of the Macedonians and then of the Romans, had broken down and almost destroyed the old compacted and coherent social groups, and were themselves on so enormous a scale as to make it very difficult, if not impossible, to conceive of any organic unity as characteristic of society. And it is also true that the later philosophical systems of the ancient world had tended to substitute the individual for the society as the primary unit of life. The Epicureans, for instance, seem to have taught that the wise man should withdraw himself from the common affairs of the State, except, and in so far as he found himself compelled to take some part in them, and while it is true that the Stoics maintained that the obligations, even of the wise man, to society were imperious and sacred, yet the Stoics themselves did conceive of the wise man as being self-sufficient, as sufficing to himself. Some well-known phrases of Seneca may serve to bring this out. In one of his treatises, he says that no man can either

injure or benefit the wise man. There is nothing which the wise man would care to receive from others, and just as the divine order can neither be helped nor injured, so is it with the wise man. A wise man is, except for his mortality, like God Himself.<sup>1</sup> And in another treatise: It is only in some general outward and loose sense that it can be said that the wise man can receive a benefit from his fellows.<sup>2</sup>

This mode of thought, which found expression just about the time of the appearance of Christianity, represents, of course, a very radical change in philosophical thought, and is indeed a symptom of an immense transformation of the conception of human life. It represents the revolt against the ideas and the practical conceptions of older society. In the earlier stages of human life, in primitive society, there is nothing which is more remarkable than the insignificance of the individual. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that the conception of the separate and independent individuality scarcely existed. In primitive society, a man is not merely a member of a group, but we might almost say that the individual man is absorbed by the group. In primitive society the group is everything, the individual is practically nothing. The individual has no freedom of action; he has, as we shall see later, very little, if any, individual relation to property, and he can hardly be said to have any consciousness of individual

<sup>1</sup> Seneca, *Ad Serenum*, viii.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, *De Ben.*, viii. 21.



moral responsibility. This characteristic of primitive society, which can be traced more or less in all its various aspects, is perhaps most clearly seen when we consider the religious aspect of primitive society, for the religion of the primitive world is not an individual religion, but is the religion of the family or the clan, of the tribe or the nation. We can find clear examples of all this in the religion of the Old Testament as everywhere else. The individual responsibility can scarcely be said to exist. The tribe suffers for the offence or guilt of its members, and the individual suffers for the guilt of the tribe. The sins of the fathers are visited upon the children, and the sins of the children upon the fathers. It was only very slowly and very gradually that the individual emerged from such conditions, and even in the great progressive civilisation of Greece, we can see the strength and tenacity of these conceptions. It has even been said that the great philosophers of the ancient world, in spite of their profound analysis of human nature and human life, never really arrived at any clear conception of individuality at all. Aristotle's great phrase, 'The State is prior to the individual,' is no doubt profoundly and permanently true, but uncorrected as it was by an adequate treatment of the individual, it can scarcely be said to have presented a complete or sufficient view of human life.

Slowly and gradually men had begun to move away from these conceptions, and it is again in



the Semitic literature that we can find, perhaps, the sharpest statement of the new tendency. I am not certain that it is quite clearly understood how revolutionary are the phrases of the Book of Ezekiel: 'What mean ye, that ye use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying, The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge? . . . Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die. . . . The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son; the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him' (Ezek. xviii. 2, 4, 20).

It has not always been understood that in these phrases Ezekiel represents the revolt against an older theory of society. It is clear that in the later Semitic religion, the individual consciousness, the individual responsibility, was becoming the centre of men's thought, and what was true of the Semitic races was true also in the western world. As we have seen, Aristotle and Plato had no very clear conception of individuality; it is in the Epicurean and the Stoic philosophy that we first begin to find a clear development of the conception of individuality, and we have already observed some of those phrases in which the new conception embodies itself.

No one can doubt that this great development in human thought was profoundly just and

necessary ; that it is exactly in this conception of the individual responsibility of the individual moral and spiritual life—this conception of the supreme significance of individuality—that the modern world finds one fundamental aspect of truth. We cannot go back upon it ; on the contrary, we can never insist upon the sense of the individual responsibility too much. At the same time it is also obvious that this conception is not adequate, that it is one-sided ; that the primitive undeveloped conception of human life contained elements which are equally and permanently true. For somehow we have to recognise alongside of the sanctity of the individual, the fact of the solidarity of human life.

It is here that we can understand the immense importance and significance of the Christian conception of the unity of life. Christianity did take up into itself the doctrine of individuality ; indeed it carried it out even further than the philosophical schools had tended to do. On the other hand, in the conception of the unity of the one body of which all are members, it supplied the necessary corrective. It is, indeed, the essential characteristic of the whole of the Christian religion, that while accepting the principle of the sacredness of the individual, it recognises that all human life is bound together by ties and links from which no one can escape. That is the final meaning of the great doctrine of the Atonement : even God Himself is within the unity of life, and not outside

it; God Himself suffers with the sufferings of men as He rejoices in their rejoicing.

It would be difficult to discuss in precise terms the exact mode in which this Christian conception of the unity of life influenced the progress of social ideas. It is evident enough to any one who considers the New Testament and the history of the Christian Church, that however imperfectly the idea may have been carried out, Christians never altogether failed to recognise the mutual dependence and the mutual obligations of men, and I think it is probably true to say that it is this conception of the unity of human life, which is related to the determined opposition of the more serious Christian thinkers, to certain anarchist tendencies in the Christian society, which we shall have to consider presently. I do not think it can be said that St. Paul clearly connects the conception of the necessity of the State with this conception of the unity of human life, and yet it is probably true to say that the relation is there, even though St. Paul himself may not have been clearly conscious of it, or may not have drawn it out in clear and definite terms. But we shall deal with the question of the Christian conception of the State in the next chapter. It is enough in the meanwhile to observe that to understand the Christian conception of human nature, we must be very careful to put alongside of the principle of the equality of human nature, alongside of the conception that every individual is himself in an

immediate relation with God, the doctrine which the Christian religion taught and still teaches, that men are inseparable members of one body, inseparably and mutually dependent partakers in one life, of which Christ is the head.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE CHRISTIAN CONCEPTION OF THE NATURE OF GOVERNMENT—I

WE have so far discussed what appear to me to be the fundamental Christian social and political ideas, that is, the theories of the essential equality of human nature and of the unity of life. How fundamental these conceptions are we cannot wholly recognise here. In order to do this we should have to consider in detail the whole structure of political and industrial society in the modern world, and that would carry us far beyond our present purpose. But it is necessary to remember that any serious examination of the structure of political society in the modern world, will show that the assumption of equality and of unity underlies the progressive development of the institutions, especially of the constitutional and democratic institutions, of modern civilisation. We must now go on to consider another, and almost equally important aspect of the Christian conception of society, and that is the Christian conception of the nature of government.

The most significant and profound aspects of the Christian conception are summed up in some great

phrases of St. Paul's which have become almost classical in the political literature of the mediæval and modern world. I think we shall all remember those great phrases with which St. Paul begins the thirteenth chapter of his letter to the Roman Church : ' Let every soul be in subjection to the higher powers : for there is no power but of God ; and the powers that be are ordained of God. Therefore he that resisteth the power, withstandeth the ordinance of God : and they that withstand shall receive to themselves judgement. For rulers are not a terror to the good work, but to the evil. And wouldest thou have no fear of the power ? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise from the same : for he is a minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid ; for he beareth not the sword in vain : for he is a minister of God, an avenger for wrath to him that doeth evil. Wherefore ye must needs be in subjection, not only because of the wrath, but also for conscience sake ' (Rom. xiii. 1-5). This phrase has been constantly quoted in the theological literature of politics, and it must be frankly recognised that it has been as often misquoted and misapplied, as it has been justly and wisely used. Indeed, the first part of this sentence was very often quoted while men forgot the second, just as the defenders of absolutism have often quoted the first words of the famous phrase of the Roman jurist Ulpian : ' Whatever pleases the Prince has the force of law,' and forgotten the rest of the sentence.



What, then, do these words of St. Paul mean? First of all they lay down in the clearest and most explicit way the principle that political authority is a thing sacred, a thing which belongs to the divinely ordered constitution of society; a thing not at all indifferent or irrelevant to religion, but rather in the closest way connected with the religious conception of the order of the world. It is well to observe this at once, because there have been moments, especially during the periods of the great struggles between the Church and the State, when it might seem as though great religious writers had repudiated the principle. Political authority is sacred, and obedience to authority is part of the religious obligation of the Christian man.

But this is not all that St. Paul says. We must ask: Why is authority sacred? And St. Paul supplies the answer. The sanctity of authority lies in the end or purpose for which authority exists. 'Rulers are not a terror to the good work but to the evil.' 'He is a minister of God, an avenger for wrath to him that doeth evil.' Government exists, that is, in order to maintain righteousness, in order to punish the wicked, and to protect the just. Thus government is a sacred institution which exists in order to maintain a just order; not any order, we must be careful to notice, but a just order. I think we can understand without any difficulty the immense significance and importance of this conception. Political authority

is a thing sacred to the Christian man, but it is sacred in view of the purpose for which it exists, and the end which it seeks to attain. It is of course true that no government does, or can, fully satisfy these conditions. There is not, and never has been in the world, such a thing as a perfectly just order, but we can say that government is sacred, just so far, and in so far, as it represents some just principle of order; just so far as its normal character is that of the defence of righteousness, and the promotion of justice. Here, then, we have a very great and profound conception of society.

In order to understand more fully what is meant by these phrases of St. Paul's, we must now try to consider the circumstances under which they were written. We must, that is, ask ourselves what it is that leads St. Paul, in a letter which is occupied with the great principles of the Christian life, to deal with this question of the obligation of obedience to the secular authority. We shall do well to begin by observing that these phrases occur as part of a very careful treatment by St. Paul of the obligation of the Christian to recognise the religious character of every aspect of his daily life. He has besought Christians to remember that it is their part to offer themselves as a living and holy sacrifice to God, and he has explained that this means the dedication of every aspect of the individual life to the service of God and of men; evidently he treats the obligation of the Christian man towards the State as belonging to the same conception, of the dedica-

tion of the whole of human life to God. The mode in which St. Paul introduces the subject bears eloquent testimony to his conviction of the essentially sacred character of the secular organisation of society in the State. But we must ask ourselves now more particularly why should St. Paul have laid this stress upon the obligation to obedience? Is there any reason to suppose that any Christian person denied or even doubted this obligation? Certainly the emphasis with which St. Paul treats the subject gives us the impression that there was some danger lest Christian men should not fully understand the nature of their relation to the secular authority.

When we begin to examine this matter carefully, we might very well at first sight be inclined to think that what St. Paul is here dealing with is the danger that the Christian society should be identified with, or should identify itself with, the tendency on the part of the Jewish community to dislike and to revolt against the authority of the Roman Empire. A large number of those to whom St. Paul was writing were, no doubt by birth, Jews, and it is extremely probable that among the Jewish Christians in Rome there were many who shared the nationalist sentiment, and the nationalist hatred, which the Jews entertained towards Rome. It is very probable that even at that date the state of feeling which ultimately led to the great revolt against Rome, was already active in the Jewish community. It is further true that the Christian

society was always in danger of a charge of disloyalty. It is clear enough from various references, both in the Gospels and in the Acts of the Apostles, that the Jewish enemies of the Christian society would have been glad to attribute to the Christian societies something like an active disloyalty to Rome. And it is further true that there is no literature in which the hatred for the Roman power is expressed in such fierce and burning words as it is in that Apocalypse or Revelation of St. John, which is at least in its final form a Christian work. We shall all remember the tremendous denunciations of that Babylon, which, I think, all now recognise stands for Rome, and the exultation over what the author conceives of as the impending fall and destruction of the great city. To some Christians of the time of the author of the Apocalypse there is no doubt that the Imperial power came to present itself as an embodiment of all that was opposed to the power of God. It is therefore quite intelligible if some people should think that these phrases of St. Paul have a primary and special reference to the duty on the part of the Christian communities to recognise the Roman authority.

I think, however, that a rather closer examination of the subject will convince us that this is not an adequate explanation of St. Paul's phrases. The first epistle of St. Peter, in a parallel passage, exhorts Christians to be subject to the civil power, and continues : ' For so is the will of God, that by

well-doing ye should put to silence the ignorance of foolish men : as free, and not using your freedom for a cloke of wickedness, but as bondservants of God ' (1 Pet. ii. 15, 16). I think there can be little doubt that what he and St. Paul were dealing with was the tendency to misunderstand and misapply the conception of the freedom of the Christian man, that the mistake which they were endeavouring to counteract was the notion that the Christian man, recognising himself to be the free child of God, is not under any obligations of obedience to a mere secular authority. The truth is that there are very clear traces in the New Testament of a dangerous tendency to what we might call anarchism in the primitive Church, a danger very real and very serious, especially among those Christians who were most closely related with St. Paul—that is, the rather anti-Judaic Gentile members of the Christian communities. I think we shall remember how emphatically St. Paul insists upon the doctrine of the freedom of the Christian man: it is also evident that St. Paul found it very necessary to guard against the possible misinterpretation of this conception. It is easy to see that the first letter to the Corinthians is, to a very large extent, concerned with the misapplication of this conception of freedom; it is probable that amongst the Corinthians, especially the Gentile Christians in Corinth, there was a great tendency to misuse such catchwords as 'All things are lawful.' St. Paul is



at great pains to counteract this by pointing out that alongside of the liberty and freedom of the Christian man, it must also be recognised that the principle of the love, which is to govern the mutual relations of men, must constrain a man to serve others and not only to please himself. I think there can be little doubt that we may connect with this such phrases as those in St. Paul's letters to the Thessalonians when he exhorts them 'That ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your hands, even as we charged you,' or again: 'We exhort you, brethren, admonish the disorderly,' or again: 'We command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly. . . . For we hear of some that walk among you disorderly, that work not at all, but are busybodies. Now them that are such we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread' (1 Thess. v. 14; 2 Thess. iii. 6, 11, 12).

I think there can be very little doubt that the great and fundamental doctrine of the liberty of the Christian man, had produced in the early Church a tendency which easily ran into disorder and a contempt for all authority. The truth is that this difficulty with regard to the Christian doctrine is one which has perpetually recurred in the history of the Church. At almost every time when the life of the Church has been revived by some great movement of spiritual exaltation, by

some great movement to renew the life of the Church by putting aside the worn-out forms and methods of other times, there has been a great tendency to carry this out into an extreme revolt against all kinds of settled order, whether in the Church or in the State. The anarchism of the primitive Church is probably strictly parallel to the anarchist tendencies which were connected with the Anabaptist movement in the sixteenth century, and the situation which confronted Luther at that time was very much the same as the situation which confronted St. Paul in the first century. I think there can be very little doubt that St. Paul's vindication of the authority of the civil ruler, and the parallel phrases in the first letter of St. Peter, were intended to counteract anarchical tendencies in the Christian societies, were intended to counteract an error which would have destroyed the unity of human life and set the Christian societies in ruinous opposition to the general order of the world in which they lived. St. Paul endeavours to persuade them of their obligation towards the order of the world by enforcing upon them the doctrine of the essential sacredness of the order of civil government.

Such is, then, the meaning, the purpose, of St. Paul's discussion of the subject ; such is the nature of the mistake which he wants to correct. And we shall do well once again to observe the immense importance of this conception of St. Paul. It is quite true that the subject is surrounded with

difficulties; it is quite true that the attempt to apply these conceptions to any actually existing order in political society, presents us with grave perplexities and raises great and serious problems; but still we must notice how profoundly significant and important the principle is. We should recognise how immensely important it is that the Christian world set out with a conception of political society as representing the principle, not of mere force, not of mere order, but of justice; how immensely significant it is that the principles of Christian society should be dominated by this conception of justice as being the divine order. It is quite true that any given human authority may, or rather must, represent it inadequately or imperfectly; that there neither is, nor can be, any human authority in which the great conceptions of justice, and of the common well-being, are perfectly and sufficiently made real; but we must remember that whatever sanctity any political organisation has, it derives from the fact that it does, so far at least, represent the divine and the just order. The State is sacred to us just in so far as it does represent the principle of justice; the normal political society is sacred because normally it does represent this ideal, this principle. Here we have, then, the Christian principle of political obligation.

But now I must ask you again to consider the relation of this principle to the political theories which were current in the western world, and again

we must observe and recognise frankly that this is not a new conception ; that this is only a re-statement in the terms of Christian theology of an old and fundamental conception of political society. Aristotle, several centuries earlier, had laid down with great force, the natural and necessary character of the political order, had laid down the principle that man was a political animal, who could only find the reality and the completeness of human life in relation to a political organisation. And further, Aristotle had found the test of a good government, in the question of the end or purpose which it pursued. Government might have many forms ; it might be a monarchy, or an aristocracy, or a commonwealth ; and any one of those forms was legitimate and praiseworthy so far as it was controlled by the principle that it existed to promote the good of the whole community, not merely the good of the governing person or classes, but the good of the whole, while any form of government which existed for the benefit only of certain classes, and of the governing class in particular, was an illegitimate and unjust and pernicious form of government. The Pauline conception that government exists for the punishment of evil-doers and the reward of them that do well, corresponds very closely with the principle of the pursuit of the common well-being, as the test of a good government. This had been the doctrine of Aristotle centuries earlier, and it is restated by Cicero, a hundred years before St. Paul, with great

eloquence and conviction. Indeed Cicero, if anything, goes rather further than Aristotle. If the government, he says, is unjust, whether it is that of the king, or of the few, or of the people, such a State is not to be called corrupt, but rather we should say that it is no State at all. There is no commonwealth or republic where all are oppressed by the authority of one, where there is no bond of law, no true agreement and union. And Cicero defines the commonwealth or State as being, not any society of men, but only a society of men which is joined together in the bond of a common law, and which endeavours to secure the common well-being. And that law which alone constitutes the uniting principle of the State, is nothing but the application to the particular circumstances of some definite society, of the eternal principles of the law of nature.<sup>1</sup> This principle of the supremacy of justice is again set out with admirable eloquence and force in the Roman jurisprudence. The definitions of the meaning of justice set out by Ulpian and other jurists, may be rather superficial and facile, but there can be at least no mistake about their conviction that the law is nothing if it does not represent the principle of justice.<sup>2</sup> This had been the view of Aristotle, this was the view of those who, at the beginning of the Christian era, followed the Stoic tradition and principles, and the Christian doctrine is, as I have already said, properly speak-

<sup>1</sup> Cicero, *De Republica*, i. and iii. ; *De Legibus*, i.

<sup>2</sup> *Digest*, I. I.



ing, nothing else than a translation into the terms of Christian theology of these great philosophical conceptions. It would be a great mistake, however, to think that the translation and restatement were unimportant. For there was another view current in the world at that time, a view which was characteristically represented by those who followed the Epicurean tradition, a conception which denied altogether the notion of any ideal significance or meaning in justice and law, but looked upon the conception of justice as representing merely the recognition by some form of agreement, of that which was found to be convenient.

It was, then, a matter of immense importance that St. Paul should have, in so thorough-going a fashion, taken up into the Christian system the principle of government of the Aristotelian and the Stoic tradition. It was of immense importance, for after all in large measure the political principles and theory of the mediæval and modern world have been governed by the Christian conceptions. The Christian theory, then, is that government is a thing sacred, representing the authority, not only of man, but of God, and that this sanctity rests upon the principle that the civil order stands for the maintenance and the security of justice in human life. Such are the general Christian principles of society, but there are serious difficulties in the working out of these principles, and we must next proceed to consider the nature of those difficulties.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE CHRISTIAN CONCEPTION OF THE NATURE OF GOVERNMENT—II

WE have considered the great significance of the statement of the sacred nature of government by St. Paul, and we have seen that under the terms of Christian theology St. Paul was restating for the Christian world the philosophical conception of the nature of political society. St. Paul set out very clearly the great principle that the authority of government is sacred, not because it represents any order, but because it represents that just system of order whose purpose and function it is to maintain righteousness and justice in the world. We must now consider shortly the history of this principle of the sacred authority of government in the Christian writers, and we must then go on to consider the meaning of certain applications of this doctrine, certain perversions of this idea, which sometimes passed current as properly representing the principle itself.

There can be no doubt that St. Paul's principle of the sacred character of government, is the normal view of all Christian writers, whether in the early centuries or in the Middle Ages. In the first

epistle of St. Clement, written probably about the end of the first century, there is a very interesting passage in what seems to be a great liturgical prayer, in which Christians pray to God for the rulers of mankind as those to whom God has given authority and glory.<sup>1</sup> And if we go down to the end of the second century we find a singularly interesting passage in the writings of Irenaeus, which sets out this conception in a somewhat characteristically strange context. Irenaeus is formally discussing, not the nature of society but the nature of the devil, and among other things that he says about him, he insists upon the fact that the devil is, above all things, a liar, and gives as a crucial example of this mendacity, the statement of the devil, when in the narrative of the temptation of our Lord, he is represented as taking our Lord on to a high mountain, and showing Him all the kingdoms of the world, and offering to give those to Him if He would fall down and worship him. The devil, Irenaeus says, was as always lying, for the kingdoms of the world were not his at all; were not his to give away. It is not the devil who has appointed the kingdoms of the world but God Himself, and he quotes a passage from the Proverbs: 'By me kings reign, and princes administer justice,' and the great phrases of St. Paul which we have already considered.<sup>2</sup> The view which Irenaeus here presents is indeed the view of all writers of the second century. Justin Martyr laid great stress

<sup>1</sup> 1 Clement, 61.

<sup>2</sup> Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.*, v. 24.

upon the fact that Christians had been taught by Christ Himself to serve the king in all things compatible with the worship of God,<sup>1</sup> and Theophilus of Antioch a little later, urged, that while the Christians could not worship the king or emperor, they were ready to honour and obey him, for it might be properly said, at least in some sense, that he had received his authority from God.<sup>2</sup> If we pass on a little later, we may notice a very interesting phrase which is used by Optatus of Milevis in a tract on the Donatist schism, in which he severely rebukes the Donatist schismatics for want of respect for the imperial authority. The orthodox party had secured the assistance of the imperial government in putting down those irregular Christians, and the Donatists were naturally enough indignant, and protested that the emperor had nothing to do with Church matters. St. Optatus replied by asserting that the empire is not in the Church but the Church in the empire, and that there is no one over the emperor but God only, who made him emperor.<sup>3</sup> And it is very interesting to find that a little earlier the writer known as Ambrosiaster, in a passage of his *Questions on the Old and New Testament*, expressed this conception of the divine nature of the authority of the emperor, by giving him the title of the 'Vicar of God'; and in

<sup>1</sup> Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, 17.

<sup>2</sup> Theophilus of Antioch, *Ad. Autolicum*, i. 11.

<sup>3</sup> Optatus of Milevis, *De Schisma Donatistarum*, iii. 3.

another passage he drew this out in a very curious phrase when he says that the emperor or king 'has the image of God as the bishop has the image of Christ.'<sup>1</sup> It is very interesting to notice this, as far as I am aware, the earliest application of the title of the 'Vicar of God' to the secular ruler. It will be remembered that the title in the Middle Ages proper, while it is also used of the secular ruler, is perhaps more frequently used of the head of the Church, that is of the Bishop of Rome, and the phrase is very significant. If we now pass to some of the great Fathers, it is worth while noticing that St. Augustine, in his treatise on *The City of God*, very clearly expresses the same conception. Indeed, St. Augustine puts it with a certain new emphasis, when he urges that it is true that a ruler is the representative of God, and receives his authority from God, not only when he is good, but also even when he is bad.<sup>2</sup> St. Gregory the Great draws out this conception in some passages to which we shall have to refer again immediately, when he urges that whether the ruler is good or evil, he must be revered as one who derives his authority from God Himself.<sup>3</sup>

These passages will be sufficient to show how

<sup>1</sup> Ambrosiaster (pseudo-Augustine), *Quaestiones Veteris et Novi Testamenti*, xci. xxxv.

<sup>2</sup> St. Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, v. 19.

<sup>3</sup> St. Gregory the Great, *Libri Moralium in Job*, xxv 16, and *Regulae Pastoralis*, iii. 4.



very emphatically the Christian Fathers of the first six centuries reproduced the great conception of St. Paul, and if we go on from this time to the earlier Middle Ages, to the writers of the ninth century, we find again, in a great body of literature dealing with political ideas, the same conception expressed with much emphasis and breadth of phrase. We may take as a very characteristic example some phrases from the *Capitula Pistensia*. This capitulary was promulgated in view of the great disorders of the time, and the authors lament the disturbances and discord in the kingdom, and complain that some men will not endure subjection to the king. Men forget, they say, that, as St. Paul affirms, all power is from God, and that he who resists the power resists the ordinance of God. God is indeed the true King of Kings, and Lord of Lords, but He has ordained that the ruler is to be king and lord in God's place (*vice sua*) on the earth. The devil fell from heaven because he would not accept his subjection to his Creator, and so he who will not recognise the power ordained by God in the world, makes himself the servant of the devil and the enemy of God.<sup>1</sup> I think this passage serves as a very good illustration of that which is the conception, the continually reiterated principle of the writers of the ninth century, for we could parallel these phrases from any one of the more important writers of the time. It is this conception which is again represented by

<sup>1</sup> *Capitula Pistensia*, I.

the repeated use of phrases such as that the king is the 'Vicar of God,' and one writer called Cathulfus puts this in words which have a very close relation to those of Ambrosiaster. He bids the king remember God always with fear and love, for he stands in His place, that is, in God's place—in *vice illius*—over all His members, to guard them and reign over them. The bishop is said to stand in the second place and to represent Christ.<sup>1</sup>

The truth is, that it was at this time, and in this connection, that there came into use those great phrases which are still employed in all Christian countries in describing the nature of the authority of the king or ruler. Charles the Great calls himself 'King by the Grace of God,' or in another place, 'Charles the most serene Augustus, the great and peaceable Emperor who is crowned by God, who rules over the Roman Empire, and who by the Divine mercy is King of the Franks and Lombards,' and again, Louis the Pious calls himself 'Louis, Emperor Augustus by the Divine providence,' or in another place, 'Louis, crowned by the Divine will.' The proper meaning of these phrases is, that the authority of the secular ruler is looked upon as being in some sense a divine authority as representing that of God Himself.

If we now look at the literature of the Middle Ages proper, we find the same conception very

<sup>1</sup> Cathulfus in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Epistolae*, iv.; *Epistolae variorum Carolo Magno regnante scriptae*, 7.

clearly and emphatically laid down. One of the earliest important collections of canons, that of Regino of Prum of the ninth century, contains a canon which pronounced the anathema of the Church on any who ventured to resist the royal power, inasmuch as it derived its authority from God Himself. This and similar canons are reproduced in almost all the great collections,<sup>1</sup> while Cardinal Deusdedit, in his collection of canons, cites the passages from Romans xiii. and 1 Peter ii., and, along with others whom I have just mentioned, cites a letter of Pope Innocent i. which defends the exercise of justice in criminal cases as being derived from the authority of God Himself.<sup>2</sup> And finally, the same principle is laid down in the *Decretals*, in a very important letter of Innocent iii. to the Emperor Alexius of Constantinople. 'God,' he says, 'has placed two great lights in the firmament of heaven, that is the universal Church; He has instituted two great dignities, one of which is the pontifical and the other is the royal power.'<sup>3</sup> The persistence of this judgment is made most clear, when we notice the immense importance, both in the ninth century and in the canon law of the twelfth century, of those great phrases of Pope Gelasius i., written in the fifth century, in which he had very emphatically laid down the principle

<sup>1</sup> Burchard, *Decretum*, xv. 22, 23; Ivo of Chartres, *Ibid.*, xii. 78; Gratia, *Ibid.*, c. xxii. q. 5, 19 (Palea).

<sup>2</sup> Deusdedit, *Collectio Canonum*, iv. 33, 34, 42.

<sup>3</sup> *Decretals*, i. 33, 6, 4.

that the world is governed by two authorities, the secular and the ecclesiastical, both of which receive their authority from Christ and God Himself.<sup>1</sup> Whatever disputes there may be about certain details of mediæval ideas with regard to the nature of secular authority, there can be no doubt at all that the normal view of the Middle Ages was quite clearly and definitely identical with St. Paul's great conception that the authority of the secular ruler is derived from God.

So much, then, for the general principle, but we must now consider briefly a theory related to this, and no doubt in some measure even derived from it, though by a perverse misunderstanding and misapplication of its meaning. This is the theory of what in later times was called the divine right of the monarch, the theory of the unlimited and indefeasible power of the king; the theory that, as far as related to his subjects, the king or ruler was absolute, that his conduct could not be challenged or questioned, and that it was in all cases unlawful or irreligious to resist the royal authority. It is easy to see how this conception might be derived, from the first aspect at any rate, of the phrases of St. Paul; it is easy to see how it might be derived from that, even though the derivation was illogical and inconsistent with the whole scope of St. Paul's phrases. Here, as in many other cases, men remembered the

<sup>1</sup> Gelasius I., *Tract.* iv. 11; *Ep.* xii. 2.

first part of a great saying and forgot the second.

Now this theory of the divine right, of the indefeasible power of the king or emperor, is, as far as I can make out, a conception which was new to the western world. We have here a doctrine which, as far as I can judge, was peculiar to Christianity. There is no evidence at all that any such conception was held by the pre-Christian writers, or by the heathen writers contemporary with the Christian Fathers. There are, indeed, some phrases in Seneca's treatise *De Clementia*, and in Pliny's great panegyric upon Trajan, which might seem to point in this direction. Seneca, in recommending clemency to the emperor, appeals to him to show himself such towards his subjects, as he would wish the gods to be towards himself, and adjures him to remember that he has been chosen out of all mankind to act in the place of God, that the life and death, the fate and the lot of all men, are in his hands, that he was the source of the laws which he has drawn out of darkness and obscurity, that the ruler, whether he is called prince or king, or by whatever other name he is known, is the very soul and life of the commonwealth. Nothing, he says, can check his anger, and not even those who suffer under his sentences will resist. How great will be his magnanimity if he restrains himself and uses his power well and gently.<sup>1</sup> We might say of this phrase that it

<sup>1</sup> Seneca, *De Clementia*, i. 1-5.



is at least conceivable that some doctrine, such as that of the divine right, might have grown up apart from the influence of Christianity, but as a matter of fact there is really no trace in the general system of the political ideas of the empire, apart from the Christian influence, of any notion other than that the emperor derives his authority from the people.

The proper origins of this doctrine must be looked for in the Christian writings. We have already observed a passage of St. Augustine in which he maintains that the authority of the ruler, whether he was good or bad, represented the authority of God, and he mentions Nero as an example of the worst type of ruler, and maintains that even such rulers received their power through the providence of God, when He judges that any nation may require such governors.<sup>1</sup> And St. Isidore, following St. Augustine no doubt, and expressing the same view, thinks it necessary even to explain away a passage of scripture, which, as it appeared to him, might be interpreted as contradicting this theory. The prophet Hosea, as he quotes him, had said of certain kings that they reigned, but not by the appointment of God, and Isidore explains that this means that God had given them to their peoples in His anger, and he concludes that a wicked ruler is appointed by God as much as a good ruler.<sup>2</sup> I think that we may

<sup>1</sup> St. Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, v. 19.

<sup>2</sup> St. Isidore of Seville, *Sententiae*, iii. 48.

very properly find the germ of the doctrine of the divine right of the kings in this conception.

What is suggested by St. Augustine and St. Isidore is drawn out in very explicit phrases by St. Gregory the Great in his book on *Pastoral Care*. He admonishes all subjects to be careful lest they should even criticise the conduct of their rulers hastily, even if they see them do some evil things. He warns them lest, when they recognise the faults of their rulers, they should grow bold against them, and urges that even if the rulers' actions are evil, subjects should be constrained by the fear of God to submit to their yoke. When we transgress against our rulers, we transgress against the ordinance of God, who set them over us.<sup>1</sup> And in another passage in his treatise on the Book of Job, he says that he who murmurs against the authority which is set over him, is really murmuring against God, who gave this authority to men.<sup>2</sup>

Here we have very clearly stated the doctrine of the divine right, and of the unlawfulness of resistance. We have here the beginnings of that doctrine which, in the seventeenth century, was completely developed, especially by some Anglicans and Gallicans.

Such, then, is the doctrine of the divine right of the king, and in considering the whole nature of the Christian influence upon western civilisa-

<sup>1</sup> Gregory the Great, *Regulae Pastoralis*, iii. 4.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, *Libri Moraliū in Job*, xxii. 24.

tion, we must take account of the fact that this conception is due, in the main at least, to influences which came into the western world through Christianity. How did it come about that these great Christian writers should have thus perverted and misapplied the Christian conception of the sacred character of political authority? It is at least probable that the sources of this error were complex. Something, I think, we must allow for the reaction against those anarchical tendencies in the primitive Church which we have already considered. It is at least quite possible that it was in part the imperative necessity of counteracting these tendencies, which might easily have proved fatal to the continuance of the Christian Church, and fatal also to the orderly development of western civilisation, which led these great Fathers into this mistake. Something also is, I think, very clearly due to the unhappy development in the Church, after the conversion of Constantine, of the policy of the repression and persecution of irregular and unorthodox forms of Christianity, and finally of the older religious system. Before the conversion of Constantine, the Church had claimed liberty and demanded toleration, but unhappily, scarcely had the empire recognised the lawfulness of Christianity and come into close relations with it, before various parties in the Church began to look for the support of the imperial government against those who differed from them. No doubt these persons would have said that they had no

intention of suggesting that the State had authority in matters of religion, but actually the policy of persecution did tend to make the State into the arbiter between the contending factions in the Church, and did increase the tendency to an exaggeration of the position of the secular power. I think we must take account of these considerations, in trying to explain the development of the theory of the unlimited divine right of the ruler. But, I think, in the end there can be very little doubt that this doctrine represents the introduction into the western civilisation of an Oriental conception of government. I think that here, as in some other matters, we can see some of the bad effects of Semitic and Oriental traditions which the Christian Church had inherited with the Old Testament. It is noticeable that St. Gregory the Great, in those passages in which he sets out this doctrine of the divine right in the strongest terms, bases his judgment upon passages, especially in the Books of Samuel—passages which present one side of the Hebrew conceptions of the position of the ruler, the conception of the sacredness of the king as the Lord's anointed. In the passages referred to by St. Gregory the Great, this is represented as having prevented David from taking any violent action against Saul, even when he was unjustly and unreasonably persecuting him. It is upon this attitude of David that St. Gregory the Great founds his principle that the subject must not rashly criticise,

and still less violently resist, the ruler, his doctrine that an offence against the existing political authority is an offence against God Himself.

It must be remembered that our knowledge of the Hebrew conceptions of government is vague, and it is certain that there were other and most important elements in it. No reader of the prophets can fail to see that for them the king was only the servant and minister of God, and that he was responsible to God for the maintenance of justice and mercy ; and that they were very confident that neglect or injustice would bring upon him the swift and certain judgment of God.

There are few stories in literature so vivid as that of the denunciation of David by the prophet Nathan for the murder of Uriah and the judgment that followed ; the best parallel is the story of Elijah and the punishment of Ahab and Jezebel for the murder of Nabett. Certainly the prophets of Israel were no soft-spoken courtiers, and to them the king was nothing if he was not the servant of God.

But it remains true that the conception of the monarch as being in some sense an embodiment of the divine power, was probably a common feature of the great monarchies of Asia. I think there can be very little doubt that in the main we shall be right in thinking that this theory of the absolute divine authority of the monarch, is to be regarded as an intrusion of orientalism into western civilisation.



We should all be agreed nowadays that this view was foolish, and I think any student of history will recognise that in the end it became extremely mischievous. Happily it is true to say that the Church, though it was some Christian writers who had set out the doctrine, did much, especially during the Middle Ages, to counteract it. In the course of the centuries which intervened between Gregory the Great and the political writers of the Middle Ages, the theologians as a whole gradually came to take a view which was quite different, and maintained that while the authority of the State is sacred, the authority of the ruler is normally derived directly from the people, and not from God directly, and that the ruler is answerable to the people for the mode in which he exercises the authority which is entrusted to him.

It is also very important to notice that while the view which we have been considering was held by Gregory the Great, and was at least suggested by St. Augustine, there was from the first current in the Church quite another mode of conceiving of the nature of government, a view which represents more normally the view of the Christian Fathers. I think it is true to say that normally the Christian Fathers did understand not only the great principle of St. Paul, that political authority is sacred, but also the second part of his principle, that the sacredness of this authority ultimately rests upon the fact that the

function or purpose of secular authority is to maintain righteousness and justice in the world. This aspect of the Christian theory is best illustrated in the works of St. Ambrose, and it will be useful to observe some of the phrases in which he embodies this conception. St. Ambrose lays down the principle that justice and beneficence form the *ratio* of the State; it is justice which builds the State up, and injustice which destroys it, and he draws this out more exactly when he says that authority is from God in this sense, that he is God's minister who uses the authority well.<sup>1</sup> He draws, that is, a distinction between the sacred order and the possibly faulty character of the person who may administer it. These views of St. Ambrose are again very well stated by Cassiodorus. He quotes the great passage from St. Paul with a very interesting comment, pointing out that the ruler is God's minister to secure justice. He recognises that it is justice which exalts the ruler and causes the State to prosper, and he exhorts the minister of the State to just conduct as being that which alone renders him worthy of the name of judge. And in another passage, he cites as a saying of Trajan, a very interesting phrase in which the emperor desires his counsellors to speak, even against him, in the name of the commonwealth.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> St. Ambrose, *De Officiis*, i. 28, ii. 19; *Exp. Ev. S. Lucae*, iv. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Cassiodorus, *Complexiones in Epist. Apost. Rom.* xiii. i.; *Varia*, iii. 27, 34, iv. 12, viii. 13.

And again, if we turn to St. Isidore of Seville, who is the best representative of the normal tradition which was handed down from the last centuries of the ancient empire to the mediæval world, it is very interesting to find him defining society, in the terms of the definition of Cicero, as a body of men joined together under one system of law (*jus*) and he draws out very sharply the contrast between the true king and the tyrant: 'The king,' he says, 'is so called from ruling' (*rex a regendo*); the king holds his name when he does rightly, he loses it when he transgresses against right. And he quotes with approval a proverb which he attributes to the ancients: 'Thou shalt be king if thou doest rightly; if thou doest not do rightly, thou ceasest to be a king'; and again, 'Justice with *pietas* is the chief virtue of kings.' And in another series of passages he points out that the duty of the ruler is to set forward justice in truth and reality, and he maintains that it is a just thing that the prince should obey his own laws.<sup>1</sup> I think it is true to say that we have here the normal view of the Christian Fathers, namely, that the sacred authority of the ruler does depend upon the fact that he is God's instrument for justice and righteousness.

It is very important to observe that this doctrine is handed on by the Fathers to the writers of the ninth century and of the Middle Ages. The political writers of the ninth century are indeed never wearied of insisting that the function

<sup>1</sup> St. Isidore of Seville, *Etym.* ix. 3, 4; *Sent.*, iii. 49, 51.

of the king is to maintain righteousness and justice. They constantly quote the phrases of St. Isidore of Seville, to which I have just referred, and they constantly urge upon the king that his principal duty is that he is to do justice and judgment.<sup>1</sup> And the same conceptions are repeated in the canon law of the Middle Ages proper.<sup>2</sup> While therefore it is true that it is from the Christian writers of the first centuries that the mischievous and foolish doctrine of the seventeenth century of the unlimited, indefeasible divine right of the monarch is derived, it is, on the other hand, important to notice that the Christian Fathers also laid down very clearly the principle that the authority of the ruler is really dependent upon the degree in which he is actually the maintainer and defender of those just purposes and ends, to secure which secular society exists.

<sup>1</sup> E.g. Hrabanus Maurus, *De Universo*, xiv. 1, xvi. 3; Jonas of Orleans, *De Institutione Regia*, 3; Hincmar of Rheims, *De Divortio Lotharii et Tetburgae: Praef*; Smaragdus, *Via Regia*, 8, 9; Sedulius Scotus, *De Rectoribus Christianis*, 2, 3, 8.

<sup>2</sup> E.g. Burchard, *Decretum*, xv. 38-43, xvi. 25-9; Deusdedit, *Collectio Canonum*, iv. 108; Ivo, *Decretum*, xvi. 39-45; Gratian, *Dec.*, D. ix. 2.; Rufinus, *Summa Decret.*, c. cxxiii. q. i. 4.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE INDEPENDENCE OF THE SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY

THE Christian principle of the sacred nature of political authority, we can now understand, might easily lead to, and did actually in many cases lead to, an exaggeration of this conception which threatened western civilisation with the great danger of a political absolutism founded upon some supposed religious authority. And as we have seen, some of the great Fathers, and especially Gregory the Great, did actually draw this conclusion from the Christian principles. It is at least true to say that Gregory the Great allowed himself to make statements which, strictly interpreted, must bear that meaning. It must remain doubtful whether Gregory the Great really understood his phrases in their natural sense. It is certainly a strange thing to find one of the greatest bishops of Rome taking up an attitude which would imply so much of almost servile deference to the State, for actually there can be little doubt that no one did more to extend and to organise the authority of the Roman pontiff and the authority of the western Church, than Gregory



the Great. It is very difficult to reconcile his words with the general character of his position. Still it remains true that one tradition which the Christian Fathers handed down to the Middle Ages, was the doctrine of the indefeasible divine right of the king. When, however, we turn to the Middle Ages themselves, we find that the attitude of the Church towards the State is a very different one ; that if we take the most representative churchmen of the Middle Ages, they are far from being inclined to hold that the authority of the king was absolute, and that it was impious to resist him. We find that they were, on the whole, clearly of opinion that normally political authority was derived from the community, from the whole people, and that in some sense at any rate, the head of the State, the king, was responsible to the whole community for the mode in which he used his authority.

How had this transition come about ? There were many circumstances, no doubt, which tended to produce this change ; the insistence upon the limitation of authority by the principle of justice ; the political tendencies of the Teutonic societies, and no doubt others. But we are for the moment concerned with another of the circumstances which tended to counteract the absolutist theory of the State ; that is, the theory or principle of the independent authority of the Church itself. It was through the Church, no doubt, that the Oriental conception of an absolute divine monarchy came into

western Europe, but the Church did much to correct the results of this conception by maintaining, and stoutly defending, the principle of the independent authority of the spiritual society. It is perhaps the most significant characteristic of mediæval civilisation, as contrasted with the civilisation of the ancient world, that mediæval society recognised the presence of two authorities in society. To the mediæval, and I think we may say to the modern world, men are under two authorities, not only one; they are governed by two systems of law and not only by one system; and these two authorities and these two systems have each got their own organisation. This conception was, I think, a new thing in the west. It is possible that there may have been a tendency to a development of something of this kind apart from Christianity and the Christian Church, though I think that if there were such tendencies, they were very little developed. It is possible that in the later stages of the ancient world we might trace the beginnings of the tendency to constitute some system of moral authority independent of the State. It is at least possible to suggest that the later philosophical systems of the ancient world, perhaps especially the Stoic philosophy, were tending to some kind of organisation which might have constituted the leaders of the philosophic schools into authorities claiming independence of the political society. I do not know how far it is reasonable to think that some-

thing of this kind may have underlain the suspicion which the empire seems to have sometimes entertained of the influence of the philosophical schools. It is certainly reasonable to conjecture that the great Oriental religions which invaded the western world about the same time as Christianity, would have tended to develop a position somewhat analogous to that of the Christian Church. All this, after all, is a matter of conjecture ; the one thing which is clear and distinct is, that from the first the Christian Church claimed that the spiritual life was outside of the authority of the State, and that with the development and organisation of the Christian Church, the spiritual aspect of life found for itself a definite organisation which, in the nature of things, claimed to be independent of political authority.

There can be no doubt as to the nature of the conditions in the first few centuries of the Christian Church. The Christians were at first persecuted by the Jews, and to a certain extent protected by the empire, but before the end of the first century, the protection or the tolerance of the empire had been transformed into an active, and sometimes a violent hostility. We cannot here discuss the causes of this hostility of the empire ; no doubt the reasons for it were complex, and their character was not altogether the same probably in the first or second century, as it was in the third. It is enough for our purpose to observe that from the time of Nero, down to the time of Constantine,

the empire was constantly hostile to the Church, and from time to time apparently did its utmost to suppress the Church. But Christian men conceived themselves to be bound to obey God rather than man, and to defy the authority of the emperor in order that they might render obedience to God. The Church in the first three centuries not only claimed to be independent of the State, but held to its own convictions and its own principles of life, against the utmost efforts of the State to suppress them.

With the conversion of Constantine, the relations between the Church and the empire were completely transformed. The empire ceased to be the enemy of the Church, and became its friend and protector, and there can be very little doubt that this change involved very considerable risk to the independence of the Church. It has even been sometimes suggested that for a time, at any rate, the Church tended to recognise the authority of the Christian emperors, not only in matters concerning temporal things, but even in regard to religious and ecclesiastical things. And it would not be difficult to find, in the writings of the Fathers, phrases which might seem to imply a deference to the State which might almost be taken as implying subordination. As we have already seen, it was in the fourth century for the first time that a Christian writer spoke of the emperor as the 'Vicar of God.' This was done by Ambrosiaster, who, indeed, uses that very strange

phrase, the interpretation of which is quite uncertain when he says that 'The emperor has the image of God as the bishop has the image of Christ.' We have seen that there are parallels to this to be found in such phrases as those of St. Optatus of Milevis, who, writing during the Donatist controversy, rebuked the Donatists for their want of respect for the emperor, and urged that they should remember that the State or commonwealth is not in the Church, but the Church in the commonwealth. The truth is, no doubt, that we have to reckon not only with the natural gratitude of the Church to the emperors, who were its protectors, but with the unhappy fact that the Church very early began to look to the secular power to suppress its enemies, both in the outer world and within its own borders. The policy of persecution which the Church came to sanction in the fourth and fifth centuries, did not necessarily imply that it was for the emperor to decide what was or was not religious truth, but it did undoubtedly tend to give the State the appearance of having a real and effective authority in all spiritual disputes and controversies.

While, however, this is true, I am myself very clear, that even in the fourth and fifth centuries the western Church, at least, never for a moment admitted that the secular power had any authority in strictly ecclesiastical or religious matters. It is very significant of the opinion of the western Church that Rufinus of Aquileia, in those books



which he added to the Church history of Eusebius, gives an account of Constantine as expressing his deference for Church authority. He represents Constantine as speaking to the bishops assembled at the Council of Nice in the following words: 'It is God who has made you priests and has given you authority to judge of us, but you cannot be judged by men.'<sup>1</sup> And it is perhaps even more significant to notice the phrases of Hosius of Cordova, one of the great churchmen of that time, who was himself in very close relation to the imperial court. St. Athanasius, in his history of the Arians, has quoted a letter which Hosius addressed to the Emperor Constantius: 'Do not interfere in ecclesiastical matters; do not take upon yourself to command us with regard to those things, but rather do thou learn those things from us. God gave thee the kingdom, but to us He has entrusted the affairs of the Church. And as he who would take away thy authority resists God, who has set thee over us, so also do thou fear lest if thou takest into thine own hands the affairs of the Church, thou shouldest find thyself guilty of great crime. It is written, "Give the things which are Caesar's to Caesar, and the things which are God's to God." It is not lawful for us to rule over the things of the world, nor hast thou, O king, authority to sacrifice.'<sup>2</sup> And it is worth while noticing that about the same time we find a

<sup>1</sup> Rufinus, *Eccl. Hist.*, i. 2.

<sup>2</sup> St. Athanasius, *Hist. Arianorum*, 44.

well-known Christian bishop, Lucifer of Cagliari, no doubt a man of somewhat violent temper, using language to the emperor which anticipates the language used by churchmen to the iconoclastic emperors in the eighth century, and by Hildebrand to the mediæval emperors. 'Prove,' he says, 'that thou wast made a judge over us, show to us by what authority you were made emperor, in order that by thy power thou mightest compel us to fulfil the will of thy friend the devil. Thou canst not prove that it was commanded thee to reign over bishops, but rather thou art in such a sense bound to obey their commands; that if thou dost attempt to overturn their decrees, thou art condemned to death. How canst thou say that thou canst judge of bishops? rather unless thou obeyest them, thou by God's command shouldest be punished with death. As these things are so, why is it that thou who art a profane person takest upon thyself the authority of the priests of God?'<sup>1</sup> These are no doubt extreme and violent phrases, but it is important to remember that they were used in the fourth century, and they serve to illustrate the fact that, at any rate in the western Church, the notion that the secular power was possessed of authority over spiritual things, was emphatically repudiated. The best illustrations of this will again, no doubt, be found in the correspondence of St. Ambrose, and in the relation of St. Ambrose to the emperors, for

<sup>1</sup> Lucifer of Cagliari, *Pro Sancto Athanasio*, I.

some of whom he had apparently a very warm personal friendship, and a very sincere regard. The story of the exclusion of the Emperor Theodosius from the Eucharist is of course familiar, but it is very significant of the principles and convictions of the Christian Church, and it is worth while to notice some phrases of St. Ambrose in his letters to various emperors. 'When didst thou hear,' he says in one place, 'most clement emperor, that laymen judge bishops in matters of faith? The truth is, that if we consult the divine scriptures of ancient times, it is evident that in matters of faith bishops were wont to judge of Christian emperors, not emperors of bishops.' And again, 'What title is more honourable than that the emperor should be called the son of the Church; the emperor is within the Church and not over the Church.'<sup>1</sup> The independent position of the Church in relation to the empire is most clearly brought out and stated in the course of the controversies of the fifth century, between Pope Felix II. and Gelasius I. and the Byzantine emperors, and the relation of the two authorities of the Church and State is definitely and formally set out in the fourth tractate and the twelfth letter of Gelasius. Before the coming of Christ, Gelasius says, there were some who were justly and legitimately both kings and priests, and Satan imitated this among the unbelievers. Hence it was that the pagan emperors held the office of Pontifex

<sup>1</sup> St. Ambrose, *Ep.* xxi. 4, 36.

Maximus. The only true king and priest was Christ Himself, but Christ, knowing the weakness of human nature, and being careful for the welfare of His people, separated the two offices, giving to each its peculiar function and duties. Thus the Christian emperor needs the ecclesiastic for the attainment of eternal life, the ecclesiastic depends upon the government of the emperor in temporal things. There are, then, two authorities by which chiefly the world is ruled—the sacred authority of the prelates and the royal power. But the burden laid upon the priests is the heavier, for they will have to give account in the divine judgment, even for the kings of men. The authority of the emperor is derived from God, and the rulers of religion obey his laws; he should therefore the more zealously obey the bishops and priests.<sup>1</sup> It is very interesting to see how clearly in this definition the spheres of the two powers are differentiated and distinguished, to observe how clear Gelasius is in holding the principle that the two authorities are independent of each other, each supreme in its own sphere, but that each is subject in the sphere of the other—the king is subject to the bishop in spiritual matters, the bishop to the king in temporal matters.

Here we have then what was, I think, the normal and the constant attitude of the Church to the State, at any rate in the west, and these are the principles which the Church of the Fathers

<sup>1</sup> Gelasius I., *Tractatus*, iv. 11 and *Ep.* xii. 2.

handed down to the Middle Ages and to the modern world. And it cannot be too clearly recognised that all this represents not only a new but an immensely important element in civilisation.



## CHAPTER IX

### CHRISTIAN THEORIES OF PROPERTY

THERE is another aspect of the social ideas of Christianity which it is important to consider, and that is, the relation of Christianity to the theory, or conception, of property. There has been a great deal of discussion about this matter, and it sometimes has been a little careless. On the one side, there have been persons who have wished to represent the Christian Church, as holding some theory of the sacred and inalienable character of private property, while on the other, some persons have maintained that the proper doctrine of Christianity is to be found in a theory of the community of Christian men's goods. It is of some importance that we should try to clear the matter up so far as may be, and that we should recognise both to what extent the Christian Church has a conception of property, and what are its relations to the more strictly scientific and historical conception of property.

We had better begin by recognising that whatever theory of property the primitive Christian Church had, it probably shared with others. There is no reason to think that the Christian Church had

any theory which was peculiar to itself. To begin at the beginning, we are all familiar with the account in the Acts of the Apostles, of what has been called the communism of the Church at Jerusalem. The first reference to this is at the end of the second chapter of the Acts. 'And all that believed were together, and had all things common; and they sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all, according as any man had need.' And there is another passage in the fourth chapter: 'And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and soul: and not one of them said that aught of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common. . . . Neither was there among them any that lacked: for as many as were possessors of land or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto each, according as any one had need.'<sup>1</sup> There is no doubt that if these words stood alone, we might easily conclude that every one was expected to bring what he had into a common stock, out of which all the members of the community were maintained. But this impression is corrected when we notice the circumstances connected, in the narrative of the Acts, with the death of Ananias and Sapphira. These people sold their property and brought a part of the price to the apostles, but kept back a certain part, and then, as the

<sup>1</sup> Acts ii. 44, 45; iv. 32, 34, 35.

narrative reports, Peter said to Ananias, ‘Why hath Satan filled thy heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? Whiles it remained, did it not remain thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thy power?’<sup>1</sup> The words seem clearly to imply that the apostle at least did not think that there was any obligation upon members of the community to bring all their possessions into the common stock. It would be very interesting to inquire what antecedents there may have been for this action on the part of the Church at Jerusalem, whether it proceeded entirely from the new spirit of brotherhood and the sense of mutual obligation, or whether it may have been related to the tradition and practice of other religious societies of that time among the Jews. There are at least some traces of this to be found in the literature of the time, and it is perhaps worth noticing that the so-called Epistle of Barnabas, and the early Christian work known as *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, both contain the following phrase: ‘Thou shalt not turn away from him that hath need, but shalt share all things with thy brother, and shalt not say that they are thine own: for, if ye are sharers in that which is immortal, how much more in those things which are mortal.’ It is generally held that these phrases of Barnabas and the *Teaching* are derived from some common source, which has been supposed to be of Jewish origin.

<sup>1</sup> Acts v. 3, 4.

The matter after all is not one of very great importance, for whatever may be the exact explanation of the circumstances in the Church at Jerusalem, it is quite clear from the evidence of the apostolic epistles, that no such system of community of goods existed in the other Churches of the apostolic time. It is quite clear from the references in these, that the individual Christian continued to hold property like other people. At the same time, it is of great importance to notice the great stress laid, not only in the Acts, but in all the epistles, upon the obligation of the Christian man to support his brother who is in need, as being a thing of paramount obligation. The words, especially of the first epistle of St. John, are very forcible: 'But whoso hath the world's goods, and beholdeth his brother in need, and shutteth up his compassion from him, how doth the love of God abide in him?' (1 John iii. 17). St. John's words represent a fundamental principle of the Church, and that this principle was recognised in the sub-Apostolic Church is very evident from many references, such as those of Justin Martyr in the *First Apology*, when he says of the Christians that they brought what they possessed into a common stock, and shared with every one in need,<sup>1</sup> or when Cyprian, commenting on the narrative in the Acts, says that such conduct is that of the true sons of God, for God's gifts are given to all mankind; the day enlightens all, the sun shines

<sup>1</sup> St. Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, 14.

upon all, the rain falls, and the wind blows upon all; to all men comes sleep; the splendour of the stars and the moon are common to all; man is truly an imitator of God, when he follows the equal beneficence of God, by imparting to all the brotherhood the things which he possesses.<sup>1</sup> If we are to understand the Christian conception of property, we must begin by recognising this conception of the obligation of the Christian man to hold that which he possesses, not for his own use only, but also for the good of the whole community or brotherhood.

We must now, however, take account of quite other aspects of the theory. It is quite evident from many references in the Fathers, that they recognised that private property is in no way evil if it is rightly used. Who does not understand, St. Augustine says, that it is not blameworthy to have such things (that is, property of various kinds) but only to love them and to put one's hope in them, to prefer them or even to compare them with truth, justice, faith, a good conscience, love to God and our neighbours.<sup>2</sup> The words of St. Augustine can be paralleled in almost any of the Fathers. But at the same time, the Fathers are undoubtedly agreed in holding the view that property is not what they call a 'natural' institution. Here is a phrase of St. Ambrose: Men think that they are fulfilling their obligations, the obligation

<sup>1</sup> St. Cyprian, *De Opere et Eleemosina*, 25.

<sup>2</sup> St. Augustine, *Contra Adimantum*, xx. 2.



of justice, when they recognise common property as common, and private property as belonging to this or that individual. But properly speaking, this is not according to Nature, for Nature gave all things to all men in common. Nature brought forth a common right; it is by usurpation that there exists a private right.<sup>1</sup> This is the general doctrine of all the Fathers. Property is not a 'natural' but a conventional institution. What does this conception mean, and where does it come from? There is no doubt as to the source of the doctrine. It belongs to the general contemporary philosophical conception of the distinction between natural and conventional institutions. In the philosophical systems of the later centuries of the ancient world, the great institutions of human life, such as government, slavery, and property, were not 'natural,' but rested upon convention or agreement. They conceived of men as having originally lived a happy and innocent life without government, without slavery, without private property. It was only as human nature was corrupted by vice that it came to be necessary to establish a system of coercive order; it was only as men grew avaricious and greedy, and were not satisfied to hold things in common with their brethren, that it came to be necessary to establish distinct and separate property. Property, in the theory at least of some of the Stoic philosophers, was the result of the vice of avarice, while it

<sup>1</sup> St. Ambrose, *De Officiis*, i. 28.

was also intended to be a corrective or remedy for it.

This is the doctrine which the Christian Fathers have taken over. They also conceived of human nature as having been once simple and innocent, and thought that had that condition continued, there would have been no need for these great institutions of actual life; it was only the fall, the depravation of human nature, that made them necessary. Had men continued innocent and unfallen, there would have been no need of property; but men, being what they are, sinful, and avaricious, and greedy, it became necessary to devise some system by which it should be determined that this thing should belong to one man, and that to another. This is what the Fathers meant when they said that God gave the world and the things in it to men in common, and that it was only by reason of some system of conventional law that it was recognised that some things should belong exclusively to some men.

They adapted this view to the traditional Christian conception of the obligation of sharing what one has with those of the brotherhood who are in need, and maintained very strongly, that while under the existing condition of things it is right that individual men should hold property, it is on the other hand an act of justice and not an act of charity that the Christian man should give to those who have need of that which he does not require. Ambrosiaster, for instance, says that

almsgiving is, properly speaking, an act of justice ; it is an act of justice that a man should not keep for himself alone that which he knows was given to all.<sup>1</sup> And St. Gregory the Great says that it is idle that men should conceive themselves to be righteous who claim for their private use the common gifts of God, for when we minister necessities to those who are in want, we give them what is their own, not what is ours, we fulfil the obligation of justice rather than of mercy.<sup>2</sup> This is the fundamental and permanent Christian conception of the limitation of the right of private property. It was drawn out in the Middle Ages, for instance, by St. Thomas Aquinas, in a very careful distinction between the right to hold property and the right to use property as we please. He holds that the right of property extends to the acquisition of things, and to the determination of how they should be distributed ; but so far as their use is concerned, men are bound to treat them as things pertaining to all. A man has the right to use what he needs, and St. Thomas takes the meaning of need in a liberal sense, but beyond this a man holds his property for the common benefit.<sup>3</sup>

The theory of the Fathers as to the origin of private property is further developed by St. Augustine in a series of very important passages,

<sup>1</sup> Ambrosiaster, *Commentary on 2 Cor.* ix. 9.

<sup>2</sup> St. Gregory the Great, *Liber Pastoralis*, iii. 21.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. esp. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 2. 2, 66, 2.

in which he maintains that property is simply the creation of the State; that it is by human law that property belongs to this or that individual, and that what the State has given the State can take away. This theory of St. Augustine's is developed by him in a series of controversial writings dealing with the Donatist schism of his time. The imperial government had, under the persuasion of the orthodox Christians, finally determined to take steps to put down the schismatic or eccentric Donatist Christians, and as a step towards this the imperial government had confiscated the Churches and other possessions of these Donatists in Africa. The Donatists naturally enough protested, and seem to have urged, not only that these confiscations were unjust, but that this interference with the rights of private property was outside the limits of the powers of the imperial government. St. Augustine, in one place, replies something as follows: Here are your 'villas.' By what law do you defend your property in these 'villas'? Is it by human law or by divine? We have the divine law in the scriptures; human law in the laws of kings. By what law is it that a man holds his property? Is it not by human law, for by the divine law the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof. God has made the poor and the rich of one dust, and it is one earth which supports the poor and the rich. It is by human law that this villa is mine, that this house is mine, that this

slave is mine ; it is by the human law ; well, it is by the law of the emperors. But if, then, you desire to hold your property by human law, let us read the laws of the emperors ; let us see if they permit heretics to possess any property ? But the Donatist replies, What have I got to do with the emperor ? Well, it is by his law that you possess your land ; take away the laws of the emperors, and who could say, This is my villa, or This is my house, or This is my slave ? Do not say, What have I got to do with the king ? or I will reply, What have you got to do with your property ? for it is by the laws of kings that men hold property.<sup>1</sup> These are very notable phrases of St. Augustine's, and they represent what we may call the classical theory of property of the Christian tradition, for these phrases have passed from the Fathers to the great writers of later times, and finally into the great body of the canon law, and represent the normal Christian tradition with regard to property.<sup>2</sup>

The only theory of property which it can be said that the Christian Church has ever formally held, is the theory that, first, property is the creation of the State, created because it was found necessary to restrain the cupidity and avarice of human nature, and that, second, the right of property is always limited by the needs of those who own it, and by

<sup>1</sup> St. Augustine, *Tractatus*, vi., in *Joanni Evangelium*, 25, 26.

<sup>2</sup> E.g. Gratian, *Decretum*, D. viii., Part 1.



the duty of maintaining those who are in want. It may be said that these conceptions are inadequate, and this is of course true. It may therefore be convenient to compare these Christian traditions with regard to property with the more strictly scientific theory.

As soon as we begin to consider seriously the history of the institution of property, we discover that the private and individual ownership of property has gradually, slowly, and never completely, emerged from group property. As we begin to go back in the history of civilisation, we discover that the fact and the idea of the individual ownership of property begin to disappear, and we do not need to go very far back before we find strong evidence that normally, property, in its most important forms, was something that belonged to a group of persons. We may say broadly that in primitive society there is very little individual property, but that what is owned, is owned normally by some group. It is well to remember that the appearance of the individual as owning property, is related to the fact that the distinctly individual life and right is itself a thing which belongs only to advanced civilisations. As we go back in the history of society, the individual tends more and more to disappear; in earlier societies the individual is merged in the group, is always a member of some group of persons, and the individual right and the individual possession has little or no significance. The group ownership

of property corresponds with the general supremacy of the group over the individual.

Private property has very gradually and very slowly grown out of group property, and has been recognised by the State because it was found by experience to be a thing convenient and useful. Probably the main reason for the development of individual rights in property was due to the fact that it was found by experience that the individual ownership and control stimulated the economic energy of the individuals. We must possibly allow something also for the fact that it was found convenient, especially by the governing members or classes in various societies. But it is probably true to say that it was found to be, on the whole, and speaking generally, convenient for everybody. It is probable that the history of property has varied greatly in different races and communities, but we have a very interesting, though not wholly normal illustration of it in the development of Roman social institutions. In the earlier stages of the Roman civilisation, the son of the family could no more acquire property for himself than the slave, but what the son, even of mature age, earned, belonged to the family group of which he was a member ; it was only by gradual steps that the man of mature age, still a member of the family group, was allowed to acquire and to retain things for himself. And the same process which gradually emancipated the son of the family, also, though more slowly, tended to emancipate

the property of the women and of the slaves. It must further be very carefully observed that this conception of the private ownership of property, as against the family group, has only in a very few countries been carried out to completeness. It is, for instance, very noteworthy, that while, with the gradual development of the power and rights of testamentary disposition, the individual has acquired a large power of determining the person or persons to whom property should go upon his death, yet, in almost all civilised countries, this right is still limited by the rights of the family group. Outside of the English law, there are not many cases where a man can will the whole of his property away from his wife and children, but in almost all civilised countries, a certain proportion of his property, at least, must go to the wife for her lifetime, and a certain proportion must go to the children. Still, with this exception, the rights of individual property have grown and developed in civilised communities, because it has been found convenient in these communities to recognise the right. Private property has grown out of the convenience of society, and it has been always, and is still, limited by the convenience of society.

It is probably true to say that the freedom of the use of private property reached its highest point with the great industrial revolution of one hundred years ago. In that great economic upheaval, for a time, almost all the limitations upon the rights of property, even with regard to property

used for production, or what we call capital, were swept away. But in the last seventy years there has been a gradual reversal of this process. Since the beginning of the nineteenth century there has grown up in Great Britain, and in all civilised countries, a great system of legislative regulation, which has again greatly limited the rights of the owner in the use especially of capital. It is not always quite clearly understood that the whole system of legislation, for the protection first of the women and children, and then of the labourers in general—the great system of Factory legislation—represents an interference, on the part of society at large, with the rights of the individual to use his property at his pleasure. What has been done with regard to one set of the relations of life by the Factory Acts, has been done in other connections by such systems as that of the sanitary laws. It was logical enough that extravagant individualists should object to the compulsory enforcement of sanitary regulations upon the householder, on the ground that these were interferences with the individual responsibility, and the individual rights in the use of property. But this great system of regulation, this great system of interference with the private rights of property, was forced upon civilised communities by the obvious inconveniences attaching to the unrestricted use of property by private individuals. It represents the fact that the same convenience of society which had once emancipated property,

has in the last seventy years compelled us again to control and to limit it.

The institution of private property, then, looked at from a scientific point of view, represents the recognition by experience of the usefulness of private property under certain conditions, and within certain limits; the development of legal private property represents the gradual recognition by the State, that something of this kind is useful and convenient to the society as a whole, and to the individuals who form the society. But it should be very carefully observed that the convenience which produced private property has also limited it, does limit it now, and will limit it in the future. We may say without any great hesitation that the State will protect private property, so far as it finds and judges it to be useful, and will also limit it and transform it so far as it judges this to be useful. On the other hand, it is at any rate probable that experience will prove that the legal right of private property represents, within limits, something which is really necessary for the protection and the development of that individuality, which it is the function of the organised community which we call the State to shelter and to develop. It is therefore probable that in some form or another, private rights in things must always be recognised by the society, because to destroy these might mean the interference with, or the destruction of, characteristics of human life which it is the very purpose of the



State to protect. But it still remains true that private property exists as a matter of fact, through the recognition and protection of the State, and that this recognition and this protection will be limited and determined by the convenience, not of the single individuals in the State, but of the whole community.

We can, then, see that while the theory of the Fathers, the tradition of the canon law, is inadequate, and, with all that theory of society which assumed a transition from a natural to a conventional state, is entirely unhistorical, yet the theory of the Christian tradition does correspond with the more scientific theory of property in its conclusions. Private property exists, as the Fathers say, in virtue of the recognition and the protection of society, and it is subject to the rational control of society.

The Christian religion, then, is not in any sense pledged to maintain any one particular form of the institution of property. It has no mandate to protect an existing right of private property against the interests and the progress of the whole society; it has no mandate to oppose a legal transference of property, or a great and even fundamental change in the whole character of the tenure of property.

## CHAPTER X

### SUMMARY

WE have endeavoured to set before ourselves some of the most important aspects of the conception of human society which originated with or were taken up into the Christian religion. We have dealt with these subjects under the terms of the equality of human nature, the unity of human life, the nature of political society and government, the supremacy of justice, the independence of the spiritual society, and the nature of property. In all these matters the ideas or theories of the Christian writers and of the Church have been important, and it is not too much to say that the character and the principles of modern society have been in a large measure formed under the influence of Christianity and of the Church. We have, I hope, seen clearly that this does not mean to say that these principles first began in the Christian society, but it is, after all, a mistake, and a very serious mistake, to think that the most important aspects of the Christian conception of life are necessarily wholly separate from, or alien to, the conceptions of the world. There was no doubt a time when it was the custom of Christian people to lay stress upon that which,

in their judgment, separated Christianity from other conceptions of life or religion. We are nowadays anxious to recognise that Christianity fulfilled and completed the truest aspects of human thought and judgment.

Which of these conceptions or principles were the most important? I think there are two among them that have an importance which is larger and more fundamental than that of the others, or perhaps we may put it in another way, and say that probably two of these include in principle all that is most important in the whole range of the Christian principles of human nature and society. These two are the principle of human equality, and the principle of the sacred or divine nature and purpose of organised political society }  
in government.

We cannot possibly have any clear view of the nature of human society at all unless we begin by making clear to ourselves what is our conception of human nature in relation to the subject with which we are dealing; what are the characteristics of human nature as they affect men's relations to each other. This is why the principle or the doctrine of human equality is of such far-reaching significance. When we look out on the world and on history, we are continually confronted by the urgent question whether the purpose of human life and the aim of human effort is to be the exaltation, the advantage, the progress of a few, or whether

Christian and honourable men must set before themselves the good, the progress and advantage of all. Are we to be satisfied with the fact that a small number of people are able to obtain a large part of that which life offers, while the great multitude leads a narrow and meagre and undeveloped existence? Are we to be satisfied with the fact that a few have the opportunity of developing all the qualities of human nature, not only the moral qualities but the intellectual powers, the capacity for knowledge and reasonable judgment, and the instinct for beauty and harmony in life? Are we to be satisfied while a few men have the opportunity to enjoy all the beauty and splendour of the world and of art, while the great multitude live in meagre, squalid, and ugly surroundings? Are we to be satisfied while a few men have much—some of them even more than they can profitably or wisely use—while other men live upon meagre fragments? It is, I think, obvious to any person who will take pains to put such questions to himself that the Christian doctrine of the equality of human nature in relation to divine life, must make us uneasy when we look back over the pitiful record of human history and the actual facts and circumstances of the world as it is. It is clear enough that no Christian person whose conscience is alive, who understands at all the meaning of the first principles of Christianity, can be satisfied. These men and women who are, equally with us all, children of God, do

not attain what we feel they ought to attain. The doctrine of equality is no doubt troubling, disturbing, unsettling, but it is, after all, the first principle of the Christian religion.

The second aspect of the Christian ideas which is of the most profound and permanent significance is the Christian doctrine of the divine nature of society, and of political society. We must again remember that alongside the Christian principle of equality, of the sanctity of the individual, alongside the conception that each individual life is sacred and has an infinite significance, we must place the equally significant principle that human life is only possible under the terms of a real unity ; that the individual cannot find his satisfaction in a solitary life, even though it were a solitary life of communion with God, but that men are all members of one body, and that as every member lives in and through the labour of the other members, so also it is its duty and function to serve the other members. There is no room in the Christian religion for an individualism which is self-centred and self-sufficient.

And it is this principle of unity which lies behind the doctrine of the sacred nature of the State. As I have already said, I do not know that St. Paul or the other writers of the New Testament clearly realised the relation between their conception of the unity of human life and their principle of the sacred nature of the State. But it is not improper



that we should put the two together, that we, recognising the necessity of unity, should also recognise that the necessary form of this, under the conditions and terms of actual human life, is and must be the organised political society. However that may be, it is of supreme importance that we should recognise how emphatically the Christian religion asserts the sanctity, the religious and moral significance of political organisation. Indeed, we have scarcely yet apprehended the full meaning of the great phrase of St. Paul, 'The powers that be are ordained of God.' The unhappy perversion or caricature of this doctrine once current amongst some Christian men, of the indefeasible, unlimited, divine authority of the monarch, has probably prevented us in modern times from taking these words of St. Paul in their full and simple meaning.

The political association, the political society of the State, is sacred. And why is it sacred? Because it exists to set forward and to maintain righteousness and justice; it is the end or purpose of the State which sanctifies it, and which justifies the coercive action of government. It is difficult, perhaps, for us looking out on the often lamentable spectacle of public and international life, to believe that this conception is true. It is difficult for us, in the face of what often must seem the moral chaos of international politics, to believe that these national societies are divine institutions. And it is difficult for us, even in relation to any

one particular State, to recognise the reality of the sacred function, the sacred purpose of the society. We criticise the methods of government; we find fault with the characters or intentions of political leaders; we see, or we think we see, elements of self-interest and unscrupulousness in political life, and we question whether it is reasonable to speak of the State as we know it, as being the minister of God for the maintenance of righteousness. And yet, this is, after all, only a confusion. We recognise—it is easy to do so—the faults and defects of political society; we forget that behind these great political societies there lie thousands of years of slow and laborious effort, of gradual growth, of the slow apprehension of the principles and characteristics which should govern the relations of men to each other. We see easily enough the defects of the State; we forget the long centuries, the long ages, through which men have striven to overcome those defects. The State has often its faults, and obviously it has its lamentable failures, but it still remains for us the method of justice and the method of progress.

I doubt whether it can be said that any serious political thinkers have ever seriously doubted that the function of political society, the function of law, is to set forward justice; but, on the other hand, it is true that there have not been wanting times when the hold of men upon this conception has been uncertain and faltering, and it is unhappily

true still that we have not yet succeeded in extending the principles of the supremacy of reason and justice from the political to the industrial sphere. It is unhappily still the case that in the industrial sphere we allow ourselves to be governed, and the conditions of men to be determined, in a large measure by unmoral forces, and not by reason and moral principles.

It is in these two principles that the Christian conception of human society finds its most complete and significant aspects : first, in the theory or principle of human equality, the principle that all men are possessed of reason and capable of virtue, are made for the life of communion with God, and that we cannot rest till their intrinsic equality finds some reasonable form in the condition and opportunities of human life ; and secondly, in the principle of the sacred character of the organised society of the State, sacred because it is the necessary method of the unity of human life, because it is its function and end to set forward the supremacy of righteousness and justice as the normal principles of the relation of man to man.

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